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THE WESTMINSTER CONTRADICTION: SANCTUARY PRIVILEGES DURING THE RICARDIAN USURPATION

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Jeff Wheeler

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ABSTRACT

THE WESTMINSTER CONTRADICTION:
SANCTUARY PRIVILEGES DURING
THE RICARDIAN USURPATION

by Jeff M. Wheeler

This thesis addresses the issue of sanctuary in England during Medieval and Early Modern times. It examines the context of Elizabeth Woodville's flight to Westminster Abbey in April 1483 and the usurpation of Richard III. In addition, the history of sanctuary in England is unfolded and compared with examples of how noble women utilized its privileges.

There were many episodes in English history where issues involving sanctuary privileges were defied, debated, and eventually resolved. The privileges of sanctuary at Westminster Abbey expanded because of these conflicts until the reign of Henry VII. Elizabeth Woodville's flight there in April 1483, if seen from this context, shows that Westminster was still considered a viable safehaven and that it protected her suitably against the infamous usurper's desire to force her out.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the following people whose influence on my work deserve recognition.

To Prof. Billie Jensen who supplied the hope and the goal to accomplish this in one year.

To Prof. Elizabeth Van Beek who drove and encouraged me to work hard and do it right.

And to my wife, Gina Wheeler, for putting up with the stacks of books, the hours in front of a computer screen, and the anxiety of a graduate student.

Table Of Contents

CHAPTER ONE

"Marriage is Destiny": The Life of Elizabeth Woodville

"Marriage is destiny," wrote Tudor historian and publicist Edward Hall in his sixteenth-century treatment of the Wars of the Roses.[1] The marriage he referred to was that of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville. Hall recognized that the tangled web of events leading to the usurpation of Duke Richard of Gloucester originated from that union solemnized on 1 May 1464. Over five centuries later, the facts and events of Gloucester's usurpation are still being disputed by historians, especially the role Woodville played in it. From a distance, the fifteenth century is not regarded as a period of great change in England.[2] This seems contradictory, considering that from 1399 to 1485 noble houses in England usurped the monarchy four times--Henry Bollingbroke in 1399, Edward of March in 1460, Richard of Gloucester in 1483 and Henry Tudor in

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The spelling in all primary documents has been modernized to facilitate the reading except where noted.

[1] Edward Hall, Hall's Chronicle (1550). (New York: AMS Press, 1965; reprint, London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1809), 264. Hall was born before 1500 and studied at King's College, Cambridge. He was an autumn reader at Gray's Inn in 1533 and a Lent reader in 1540. A political supporter of Henry VIII, Hall wrote and compiled his history of England, 'The Union of the Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and York' and it covered the history from Henry IV's kingship to the death of Henry VIII. Hall died in 1547. The first edition was printed in 1542; the second edition came in 1548, but Richard Grafton edited it, adding some notes Hall had written but not included, and re-published the work in 1550. The edition used in this work is a reprint from the 1809 Ellis edition, a reprint itself of the 1550 Grafton version. See The Dictionary of National Biography (to 1900), edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. Vol 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937-8), 947-48.

[2] Joel Rosenthal, Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth-Century England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 4. Rosenthal is a recognized authority on fifteenth-century England and has written a number of works during his distinguished career. His work was recommended to me by Barbara Harris at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. See also, Rosenthal, Nobles and the Noble Life 1295-1500 (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1976); Joel Rosenthal and Colin Richmond, eds. People, Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); and Rosenthal, Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990).

1485. However, it must be understood that political upheaval in the peerage, treason and attainder, and usurpation were considered normal in England during this time.[3] Gloucester's usurpation in 1483 did not happen in a political vacuum. Rather, it was part of the political tradition Gloucester had learned from previous men in England with power.[4]

There was also a political tradition for women with power in fifteenth-century England. Power was often defined by public authority and therefore limited strictly to men.[5] Yet despite this condition, women were the conduits for transmitting authority in the patriarchal system.[6] Though there was little women could do to overcome these circumstances of medieval life, they could increase their power by relationships with others. Marriage was often the most immediate means of increasing, or losing, power.[7] Religious laws and social customs supposedly helped restrict and regulate the bounds of propriety in marriage, yet these were also used as tools to end undesirable marriages.[8] In the case of Elizabeth Woodville, certain laws and customs were used by her brother-in-law to challenge her right of queenship. Hall's Chronicle recorded the irony that elevated Woodville from her family's manor house in Grafton to Westminster Palace as the wife of Edward IV. Her position changed again due to her flight to Westminster Abbey for

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[3] Rosenthal, Nobles and the Noble Life, 35.

[4] Charles Ross, Richard III (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 79-80.

[5] Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, eds., Women and Power in the Middles Ages (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 1-3.

[6] Rosenthal, Patriarchy and Families, 175.

[7] Rosenthal, Nobles and the Noble Life, 35. Between 1438 and 1504 alone, twenty-one peerages were continued by heiress-wives to their husbands. The political and economic impact of marriage made noble women an important commodity on the market for power. Unfortunately, wives were often affected by the crimes of their husbands and felt the sting of their attainder.

[8] Ibid., 89-90.

protection. This occurred before Gloucester stripped her of her rank, calling her "dame Elizabeth Grey late calling herself Queen of England."[9] After Richard III's defeat at Bosworth in August 1485, and her daughter's subsequent marriage to Henry VII, she was recognized again as Queen Dowager. Yet the vicissitudes of Woodville's life left her in early retirement at Bermondsey Abbey. Upon her death there on 8 June 1492, she left her children her blessing and little else: "It'm, where I have no worldly goods to do the Queen's Grace, . . . neither to reward any of my children, according to my heart and mind, I beseech Almighty God to bless her Grace, with all her noble issue, and with as good heart and mind as is to me possible, I give her Grace my blessing, and all the forsaid my children."[10]

Who was this Queen found kneeling in the floor rushes of Westminster Abbey in April 1483, "desolate and dismayed" about her uncertain future?[11] Historians have represented Elizabeth Woodville in many ways. Agnes Strickland and David MacGibbon have written the two main biographies, which now are dated.[12] Most often, scholars depict her as a manipulating, shortsighted woman who tried but failed in the arena of

[9] Henry Ellis, Original Letters, Illustrative of English History. Second Series. Vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 149.

[10] A Collection of All the Wills, Now Known to be Extant, of the Kings and Queens of England (New York: Kraus Reprint Co.,1969), 350.

[11] Thomas More, History of King Richard III (1566) from The Complete Works of St. Thomas More. Edited by Richard S. Sylvester. Vol. 2. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 21: "The Queen herself sat alone low on the rushes all desolate and dismayed, whom the Archbishop [Rotherham] comforted in the best manner he could, showing her that he trusted the matter was nothing so sore as she took it for."

[12] Agnes Strickland, Lives of the Queens of England. 2 vols. (New York: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1843), and David MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville (1437-1492), Her Life and Times (London: Arthur Barker Ltd., 1938).

politics. Strickland described Woodville's beauty at age twenty-nine, contrasted it to Edward IV's youth, and declared that her comeliness and personality had a strong impact on his mind.[13] During a marriage where the king was constantly unfaithful to her, Strickland believed that Elizabeth used her charms, not always successfully, to promote her advantages as queen:

> Elizabeth, from first to last, certainly held potent sway--an influence most dangerous in the hands of a woman who possessed more cunning than firmness, more skill in concocting a diplomatic intrigue than power to form a rational resolve. She was ever successful in carrying her own purposes, but she had seldom a wise or good end in view; the advancement of her own relatives, and the depreciation of her husband's friends and family, were her chief objects.[14]

After Edward IV's death, Strickland insisted that Woodville relented to William Hastings' insistence that Prince Edward be escorted by a modest force: "Thus taunted, the hapless Elizabeth gave up, with tears, the precautionary measures her maternal instinct had dictated."[15]

Strickland's interpretation of Elizabeth's character influenced Edward MacGibbon's biography. His work departed slightly from Strickland's observations, yet both of their evaluations of her are strikingly similar. Woodville was self-interested, calculating, and manipulating:

> Elizabeth seems, from some accounts, to have been a person of cool, calculating decision of character, without any deep affection, but of steady dislikes and revengeful disposition. She was destined to retain a lasting power over the mind of her husband--a most dangerous weapon in the hands of a woman possessed of great cunning and powers of intrigue--and was able to influence him to her will without publicly appearing in political affairs.[16]

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[13] Strickland, Lives of the Queens of England, Vol. 1, 614.

[14] Ibid., 617.

[15] Ibid., 632.

[16] MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville, 41. Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs correctly pointed out in their article that MacGibbon's biography quotes without acknowledgment from Strickland's

MacGibbon believed that after Edward IV's death, Woodville was motivated to seek sanctuary to protect her second son and her property: "In that moment of anguish the widowed Queen either remembered or, as seems more likely, was reminded by the Chancellor, Archbishop Rotherham . . . that as long as she could keep her second son in safety, the life of the young King was secure."[17] MacGibbon also asserts that her fear of Gloucester was justifiable; after all, "she had indeed played for big stakes, and been well and truly beaten. She seems, however, to have been hardly less anxious about her property."[18]

These views were critically challenged in a 1995 article by Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs who argued that new evidence suggests she was a "pious, responsible, fifteenth-century queen" who "knew and endeavoured to realise the role and duties of her office."[19] They reconstructed Elizabeth's reputation from her only surviving household account, her good works, and the books she owned.[20] Though Sutton and Visser-Fuch's re-evaluation of Strickland's and MacGibbon's biographies is excellent, the evidence from their new sources does not convincingly demonstrate that Woodville's actual reputation was the opposite of what was described by contemporaries. It is difficult to determine her reputation solely from the fact that she acted according to the tradition of her rank. Recent scholarship by Michael Hicks and J.R. Lander has also shown that

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work. Anne Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen' Queen Elizabeth Woodville's Reputation, her Piety and her Books," The Ricardian 10 (June 1995): 236 n. 10.

[17] MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville, 144.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A Most Benevolent Queen," 214.

[20] Ibid.

Elizabeth played the dominant role in the Woodville family after her marriage to Edward IV.[21] In an important work chronicling the correspondence of the Queen in the Middle Ages, Anne Crawford recognized and properly attributed Elizabeth's pivotal role in English history when she wrote, "If Elizabeth was not solely responsible for the downfall of the House of York, she and her family must bear a good deal of the blame."[22] Crawford described her as cold, avaricious, and beautiful; she also included an account of a Hungarian visitor commenting "on the splendour and arrogance of the queen."[23] Yet there is no reason to suspect her intentions when she arranged marriages to her extensive immediate family. Woodville earned the opportunity to do so when she convinced Edward IV to marry her, and the matches were not solely to her political advantage.

Woodville's influence over her husband's mind is not the central problem to be addressed in this work. Rather, the intent is to examine her reaction to the sudden change in social position she underwent upon the sudden death of her husband in 1483. Having been accustomed for nearly twenty years to being the first lady of the realm, she was probably unwilling to relinquish her power and allow another man, other than her son, to have authority and dominion over her and her family's future. Upon the death of Edward IV, her son Prince Edward became the king and by that right had authority over her.

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[21] See Michael Hicks, Richard III and his Rivals (London: The Hambledon Press, 1991); Also J.R. Lander, Crown and Nobility 1450-1509 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976). These historians are experts on the rise of the Woodville family in Yorkist England.

[22] Anne Crawford, ed., Letters of the Queens of England 1100-1547 (United Kingdom: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1994): 133.

[23] Ibid.

Whoever controlled that Prince would control the future role of the Woodville family in the kingdom.

The struggles between Richard of Gloucester and the Queen were captured by contemporary fifteenth-and sixteenth-century authors in letters and chronicles. These works represent the body of available evidence that can be used to examine Gloucester's usurpation and Woodville's role in it. Because the bulk of the evidence was written by male historians with medieval and early modern preconceptions about women, it is difficult to glean accurate information about Woodville from the fragments, but there is enough to recreate a sense of who she was.[24]

Woodville was born, probably at Grafton, in 1437. She was the firstborn of Richard Woodville and Jacquetta of Luxembourg.[25] Her family were staunch Lancastrians. Around 1451, she married Sir John Grey, after rejecting a suitor proposed by the Earl of Warwick.[26] Woodville's husband was born in 1432 and was the eldest son of Edward Grey. He became the eighth Baron Ferrers of Groby after the death of his father in 1457. Woodville bore her husband two sons as the Wars of the Roses commenced. The elder was Thomas Grey, born around 1451. He became first marquess

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[24] Other primary records include a few of her letters; her will which was made at Bermondsey Abbey; a record of her coronation ceremony by George Smith (1465); one surviving household account from 1466-67; and the records of near-contemporary historians like Thomas More, Polydore Vergil, Dominic Mancini, the Croyland chronicler, and Edward Hall.

[25] The Dictionary of National Biography (to 1900), edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. Vol. 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937-8), 614-18. Also Elizabeth Hallam, ed. The Plantagenet Encyclopedia (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 212.

[26] MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville, 16-17. Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, attempted to persuade the young fifteen year-old to marry Sir Hugh Johns, one of Warwick's favorites. This shows an early connection between herself and the Nevilles, one that obviously did not begin amicably when Elizabeth rejected Sir Hugh for Sir John.

of Dorset and a strong supporter of his mother. The younger son, Richard Grey, was arrested by Gloucester at Stony Stratford in 1483, taken to Pontefract castle, and executed in June of that year. During the Wars of the Roses, Woodville's father and brother were arrested in January 1460 by the Earl of Warwick, the Earl of Salisbury, and Edward of March (her future husband) and transported to Calais where they were humiliated but spared by the Yorkists.[27] Her husband was killed at the second battle of St. Albans on 17 February 1461. Woodville and Edward IV met at her father's manor in Grafton Regis shortly after his victory at Towton in 29 March 1461. There, they began a secret courtship. At Grafton Manor in Northamptonshire, the contemporary historians introduce the beautiful Elizabeth Woodville to their readers and to her future husband, Edward IV.

Nearly every contemporary chronicler or author mentioned the meeting of Woodville and Edward IV. Yet the level of detail varies depending on the source. Written in 1550, Edward Hall's Chronicle includes more than other writers of his time, yet it reveals the author's sense of exaggeration more than it does the king and his future bride. Hall borrowed heavily from the Italian humanist Polydore Vergil's Anglica Historia (1534) and from the Tudor political theorist Sir Thomas More's History of King

[27] MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville, 19. Taken from the Paston Letters, vol. III, 203-4: "My lord Rivers was brought to Calais and before the lords with eight score torches, and there my Lord of Salisbury rated him, calling him knave's son, that he should be so rude to call him and these other lords traitors, for they shall be found the king's true liegemen when he should be found a traitor. And my Lord of Warwick rated him and said that his father was but a squire and brought up with King Henry the Fifth, and sithen himself made by marriage, and also made lord, and that it was not his part to have such language of lords, being of the king's blood. And my Lord of March also rated him in like wise. And Sir Anthony was rated for his language of all three lords in like wise."

Richard the Third (1566).[28] The true value of Hall's work is his first-hand evidence based on the reign of Henry VIII, not Richard III. About Woodville, Hall wrote that she petitioned the king for her dower rights as Grey's widow after her husband's death at the Battle of St. Albans:

> This widow having a suit to the king, either to be restored by him to some thing taken from her, or requiring him of pity, to have some augmentation to her living, found such grace in the king's eyes, that he not only favored her suit, but much more fantasied her person, for she was a woman more of formal countenance, then of excellent beauty, but yet of such beauty & favor, that with her sober demeanor, lovely looking, and feminine smiling (neither too wanton nor too humble) beside her tongue so eloquent, and her wit so pregnant, she was able to ravish the mind of a mean person, when she allured and made subject to her, the heart of so great a king.[29]

Apparently, Woodville had a great effect on Edward IV, who risked political gains by pursuing her.[30] There were risks when the recent widow refused the king's amorous advances, but her continence impressed the king:

> After that king Edward had well considered all the lineaments of her body, and the wise and womanly demeanor that he saw in her, he determined first to attempt, if he might provoke her to be his sovereign lady, promising her many gifts and fair rewards, affirming farther, that if she would thereunto condescend, she might so fortune of his paramour and concubine, to be changed to his wife & lawful bedfellow: which demand she so wisely, and with so covert speech answered and repugned, affirming that as she was for his honor far unable to be his spouse and bedfellow: So her own poor honesty, she was too good to be either his concubine, or sovereign lady: that where he was a little before heated with the dart of Cupid, he was now set all on a hot burning fire.[31]

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[28] The Dictionary of National Biography (to 1900), edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. Vol 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937-8), 947-48. Also Alison Hanham, Richard III and his Early Historians, 1483-1535 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 103-4.

[29] Hall's Chronicle, 264.

[30] Charles Ross, Edward IV (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 86-89. Also Cora Scofiled, The Life and Reign of Edward the Fourth. Vol 1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1923), 332-33. Ross and Scofield agreed that Woodville was not a politically wise match for Edward IV. They both feel that Edward's libido was the impetus for his advances.

[31] Hall's Chronicle, 264. Hall credits Edward IV with honorable intentions of testing her virtue before making her his wife. Considering his notorious reputation with women, one must reject this

Edward IV secretly married her at Grafton Regis on 1 May 1464, with only her mother, the priest, and two gentlemen and a boy as witnesses.[32] This is one instance where Hall did more than copy Polydore Vergil's work, for the added details appear to be taken from Thomas More.

The Italian humanist Polydore Vergil was born in Urbino around 1470. He became secretary to the Duke of Urbino and later received a reference from him when Vergil decided to visit England. While in Padua, he wrote Proverbiorum Libellus and the De Inventoribus Rerum, the latter being published in 1498 and dedicated to the Duke of Urbino. Vergil also served as chamberlain to Pope Alexander VI in Rome, where he met one of the Borgian pope's relatives who worked as a tax collector for the English monarch, Henry VII. He came to England in 1501, was well received by the Tudor king, and in 1505 was commissioned by royal decree to write a history of England. Though he finished the initial research for his Anglica Historia in six years, it was not published until 1534.[33] On 11 April 1515, Vergil was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London

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assertion. See Charles Ross, Edward IV, 87; the passage reveals that Edward's reputation for lechery preceded him and provided "the background against which reports of Elizabeth's virtuous resistance to the king's advances must be judges." Ross concluded that there is merit to the idea that Edward agreed to marriage to achieve his desires. Also, Cora Scofield, The Life and Reign of Edward the Fourth, 332; Scofield wrote that Edward married her "pour sa beauté et par amourette"--for her beauty and for her love. The fame of their marriage throughout Europe inspired Antonio Cornazzano, an Italian poet and courtier, rather inaccurately to write about their romantic union. The work was called De mulieribus admirandis (1465) and was written while the author was in Milan. See Conor Fahy's article "The Marriage of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville: A New Italian Source," English Historical Review 76 (October 1961): 660-72.

[32] MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville, 35. MacGibbon identified the priest as Thomas Leson, who had served Grafton manor from 1462 to 1471.

[33] The Dictionary of National Biography (to 1900), edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. Vol 20 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937-8), 250-53. Also Denys Hay, Polydore Vergil: Renaissance

on charges of vilifying Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. After an appeal to Henry VIII by the Pope, he was released by December. During the religious turmoil in England, Vergil traveled between England and Rome and remained a Catholic. He died back in his home city of Urbino in 1555. His work, the Anglica Historia, was hostile to Richard III and supportive of Henry VII. This comes as no surprise as he personally knew and worked for the first Tudor king.

Vergil's work castigated Edward IV for his marriage to Woodville. In one passage, he indicated that Edward's "mind altered upon the sudden" and that when the realm learned of their secret marriage:

> All men incontinent wondered, that the nobility truly chaffed, and cast out open speeches that the king had not done according to his dignity; they found much fault with him in that marriage, and imputed the same to his dishonor, as the thing whereunto he was led by blind affection, and not by rule of reason.[34]

His information about Richard of Gloucester is less helpful because of its pro-Tudor bias. Yet despite the animosity he held for Gloucester, one does sense in Vergil a grudging respect for the way he died in battle at Bosworth in August 1485: "Truly he had a sharp wit, provident and subtle, apt both to counterfeit and dissemble; his courage also halt and fierce, which failed him not in the very death, which, when his men forsook him, he rather yielded to take with the sword, than by foul flight to prolong his life, uncertain what death perchance soon after by sickness or other violence to suffer."[35]

Historian and Man of Letters (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952). The edition used in this work was edited by Sir Henry Ellis in 1844 comprising the reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III.

[34] Polydore Vergil, Anglica Historia Books 23-25 (1534). (London: J. B. Nichols, 1846), 116-17.

[35] Ibid., 227.

The difference in detail between Hall's Chronicle and Vergil's Anglica Historia over Woodville's marriage to Edward IV is noticeable. However, there is little difference in detail between Thomas More's History of King Richard III (1566) and Hall's.[36] More's remarks concerning the marriage also romanticized it:

> Whom, when the king beheld and heard her speak--as she was both fair, of a good favor, moderate of stature, well made, and very wise--he not only pitied her, but also waxed enamored on her. And taking her afterward secretly aside, began to enter in talking more familiarly. Whose appetite when she perceived, she virtuously denied him. But that did she so wisely, and with so good manner, and words so well set, that she rather kindled his desire than quenched it.[37]

However, there is controversy about whether More is the actual author of the History of Richard III. In 1596, John Harington stated that he heard that John Morton, the Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VII, wrote the Latin version. In 1646, Sir George Buc echoed this claim of Morton's authorship. One nineteenth-century historian, Sir Henry Ellis, believed that Morton wrote the English version and More the Latin. Despite the mystery of its authorship among these historians, More is credited with having written it and even having intended it to be a satire.[38] Though More's work offers details about the usurpation and the murder of the Princes in the Tower and leaves more questions than it answers, it is still one of the few surviving accounts from a contemporary source.

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[36] The Dictionary of National Biography (to 1900), edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. Vol 13 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937-8), 876-96. More's History of King Richard III was never completed. William Rastell, More's nephew, said that the first incomplete version was finished in 1513 and published in Grafton's continuation of Hardyng's Chronicle in 1543 and in Hall's Chronicle in 1548. The work cited here is from the Latin version of More's works, published in 1566. It was collated by Richard S. Sylvester with the English versions for the 1963 Yale University Press Complete Works of St. Thomas More. See also Alison Hanham, Richard III and his Early Historians, 1483-1535, 152-3.

[37] Thomas More, History of King Richard III (1566) from The Complete Works of St. Thomas More. Edited by Richard S. Sylvester. Vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 62.

[38] Alison Hanham, Richard III and his Early Historians, 1483-1535, 152-90.

Another useful account in understanding Woodville also left a riddle over its authorship. Written in 1486, the Croyland Chronicle was composed by a man who visited the Abbey of Croyland. This unknown author contributed to the abbey's chronicle of the events of the Wars of the Roses from 1459 to 1486. Bishop John Russell of Lincoln, Richard III's chancellor, has long been suspected of being the author of the Croyland account, a document completed less than a year after Bosworth.[39] Two modern historians, Nicholas Pronay and John Cox, contend, however, that there is enough evidence to doubt Russell's authorship. Despite the lack of conclusive evidence pinpointing the author, it is certain that the Croyland chronicler was an ecclesiastic who had tremendous experience serving the kingdom. The work does not offer any information about the events Edward IV's marriage to Woodville, but it does discount the idea that the marriage created the breach between the king and Warwick, his cousin. Instead, the breach was caused by Edward IV's support of the Duke of Burgundy: "It is my belief that this was the this was the real cause of dissension between the king and the earl rather than the marriage between the king and Queen Elizabeth as previously stated."[40] The author also offers a positive comment about Woodville before Gloucester's usurpation: "However, the benevolent queen, desirous of extinguishing every spark of murmuring and unrest, wrote to her son that he should not have more than 2,000 men

[39] See Nicholas Pronay and John Cox, "*Ille Qui Hanc Historiam Compilavit* - The Riddle of Authorship" in the introduction to The Crowland Chronicle Continuations 1459-1486 (London: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1986), 78-98. Ralph Griffiths, P.M. Kendall, Goronwy Edwards, M.M. Condon, and Charles Ross all expressed belief in Russell's authorship.

[40] Croyland Chronicle, 115.

when he came to London."[41] The Croyland Chronicle offers a fresh and accurate contemporary view of the Wars of the Roses and the usurpation of Gloucester culminating in his defeat at Bosworth.

Another contemporary account of Gloucester's usurpation was discovered in 1934 in a municipal library in Lille by C.A.J. Armstrong. It was a letter written by Dominic Mancini to the Archbishop of Vienne in December 1483. It was entitled *De Occupatione regni Anglie per Riccardum Tercium*, and translated as The Usurpation of Richard III. Born in the late 1430s, Mancini was probably an Augustinian friar. By 1482, he lived in Paris and worked for Angelo Cato, Louis XI's physician.[42] The work was written in a classical style, showing hints of technique and structure from Sallust and Suetonius.[43] It is the only pre-Tudor source from a contemporary who lived in London during and immediately following Richard III's coronation. The fact that he was a foreigner, however, affected his accuracy in certain areas. For example, Mancini railed against Edward IV for being "licentious in the extreme" and one who "pursued with no discrimination the married and unmarried the noble and lowly: however he took none by force."[44] Yet Mancini included a myth about Edward IV's attempt to persuade Woodville to submit to his passion at knifepoint:

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[41] Ibid., 155.

[42] A. J. Pollard, "Dominic Mancini's Narrative of the Events of 1483." Nottingham Medieval Studies 38 (October 1994): 153. For the discovery article of the manuscript, see C.A.J. Armstrong, "The Crimes of Richard III." The Times (London), 26 May 1934, 13-14.

[43] Pollard, "Dominic Mancini's Narrative," 153. See also Michael Hicks, Richard III: the Man behind the Myth (London, 1991), 76.

[44] Dominic Mancini, The Usurpation of Richard the Third (1483) trans. by C.A.J. Armstrong (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 67.

> One of the ways he indulged his appetites was to marry a lady of humble origin, named Elizabeth, despite the antagonism of the magnates of the kingdom, who disdained to show royal honours towards an undistinguished woman promoted to such exalted rank. She was a widow and the mother of two sons by a former husband : and when the king first fell in love with her beauty of person and charm of manner, he could not corrupt her virtue with gifts or menaces. The story runs that when Edward placed a dagger at her throat, to make her submit to his passion, she remained unperturbed and determined to die rather than live unchastely with the king.[45]

This portrayal of Woodville's virtue contradicts the medieval image of women being lustful in nature and susceptible to sexual sins.[46] Though the episode about Edward IV threatening Woodville his intended with a knife is probably only a rumor, Mancini's account offers a priceless glimpse at fifteenth-century London from the eyes of someone who lived in it.

A careful evaluation of the primary and secondary sources reveals that an accurate sketch of Woodville is replete with inconsistency and paradox. Yet if pressed to choose between More's image of a weeping Woodville kneeling on floor rushes at Westminster and Mancini's image of her flouting a besotted king's threatening knife, this student of the early modern period is inclined to believe that Mancini's image more accurately represents her. Woodville's "beauty of person and charm of manner" enabled her to rise from king's subject to Queen of England. Strickland's and MacGibbon's stereotypical portrayal of her as a cold, calculating woman bent on offending the entire realm is unrealistic. Yet Sutton and Visser-Fuch's contend that her model queenly behavior made

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[45] Dominic Mancini, The Usurpation of Richard III (1483), 61.

[46] Ruth Mazo Karras, Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England (New York, 1996), 107. See also Sharon Farmer, "Persuasive Voices: French Noble Women," Speculum 61 (July 1986): 517-43. Also, Joan Cadden, Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine,

her a model queen in reality is also tenuous. On the other hand, J.R. Lander's judgement that the Woodville family, and the Queen particularly, were personally detested by the Earl of Warwick, and not necessarily by the other peers of the realm is strong and convincing.[47] Likewise, Michael Hicks' view that the Queen helped position her family into political prominence by arranged marriages and her leverage with Prince Edward and Prince Richard is equally sound.[48]

This work diverges from the common scholarship on Woodville in that the primary evidence shows that not only was she a powerful and influential woman during her husband's reign, but that she was capable of performing political murder to assure her family's high position after her husband's premature death on 9 April 1483. In mid-April of that year, the Queen summoned Prince Edward from his estates in Wales. She began arranging her son's early coronation to thwart the possibility of a protectorship under Richard of Gloucester. Woodville knew that messages had been dispatched to Gloucester in Yorkshire. She anticipated that he would travel down from the North with a sizable escort, though smaller than the one accompanying her son, to meet the Prince. The young King's retinue stopped in Stony Stratford to wait for Richard to reach Northampton; the

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Science, and Culture (Cambridge, 1993) and Henrietta Leyser, Medieval Women : A Social History Of Women In England, 450-1500 (Oxford, 1995), 93.

[47] J.R. Lander, Crown and Nobility 1450-1509 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976), 94-124.

[48] Hicks, Michael, Richard III and his Rivals (London: The Hambledon Press, 1991).

king's uncle went to greet the Duke and escort him to the Prince's company the following morning.[49]

The Woodville manor at Grafton Regis stood along the road between the two cities. During the night of 29 April 1483, something happened that instigated the events which led to the usurpation of Gloucester. The occurrence was dramatic enough to cause the Queen to flee for her life to the sanctuary at Westminster Abbey, a place of refuge that held the most powerful privileges granted in England. The Abbey was a home of criminals, debtors, tradesmen, and the abbey monks who ran it. There, Woodville remained in sanctuary for nearly a year. She did not leave Westminster's protective walls until after she had obtained a written assurance from Richard III in the first year of his reign that her life and the lives of her children would be safe in his hands.[50] Though Woodville entered sanctuary as Queen of England, she left it with the legal title of "dame Elizabeth Grey."

After entering sanctuary in April 1483, Woodville agreed to release her second son, Prince Richard, and then later her daughters--Elizabeth, Cecily, Anne, Catherine, and

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[49] Samuel Lewis, A Topographical Dictionary of England, vol. 4 (London: S. Lewis and Co., 1865), 239-40. Stony Stratford is a market town on the borders of Northampthonshire and Buckinghamshire. Approximately fifty miles northwest of London, medieval Stony Stratford consisted of a few inns and was commonly used as a stopping point for merchandise along the road to London. There was also a bridge built by the Romans spanning the Ouse, but it was destroyed during the Civil War of the seventeenth century. Northampton is approximately fifteen miles north of Stony Stratford. It is a borough and market-town and has a rich medieval history. A battle was fought during the Wars of the Roses on 9 July 1460, and Edward IV's army was scattered by Warwick. Warwick's men marched down the road and abducted the Queen's father and brother and brought them back to Northampton. At Northampton, Warwick and Clarence had them executed. See Lewis, Topographical Dictionary of England, vol. 3, 409-12.

[50] Henry Ellis, Original Letters, Illustrative of English History. Second Series. Vol. 1. (New York, 1970), 149.

Bridget--into Richard of Gloucester's custody. Then and only then, did she remove herself. The interpretation of these events by contemporary and modern historians has created contradictions, both in understanding the practice of sanctuary and in a correct assessment of the Queen's character and reputation. Chapter Two will examine these contradictions in light of the history of sanctuary practices in England up until they were dissolved by James I. Information presented in this chapter will discuss specifically the status of sanctuary during the Wars of the Roses and argue against the assertions that Richard of Gloucester intended to violate sanctuary. These assertions are inconsistent with the evidence available about sanctuary privileges in medieval England.

Chapter Three will discuss Woodville's attempt to destroy Gloucester during his journey south to London. Evidence reveals that the thwarted attempt against the future Protector's life prompted the Queen to seek the safety of sanctuary and led to his usurpation. The Woodvilles had the motive, cause, and opportunity to stage such a coup against the most powerful man in England after Edward IV's death.

The events of 1483 were not caused by the lust and ambition of one man. They involved a complex power struggle between a variety of factions who wielded the tools of political power. This work offers a reinterpretation of the actions of Richard of Gloucester and maintains the current belief that they were not spontaneously inspired by his own greed and ambition. Where this work parts with others is in the argument that Richard's actions were provoked by the Queen. This work also offers a reinterpretation of Elizabeth Woodville as being fully capable and willing to plot and execute such a bold

move. She was not motivated by ambition or greed, but acted from a desperate need to control her own future during a particularly unstable and politically tumultuous time. By bringing a woman of lower rank, compared with a foreign princess, to the high rank of queen, Woodville's marriage to Edward IV influenced the "destiny" of the kingdom. Yet the end of Elizabeth's marriage drastically affected the destiny of England more than the marriage itself, for it led to the usurpation of Richard III, the fall of the Plantagenet kings, and the creation of a new dynasty, the House of Tudor.

CHAPTER TWO

The Westminster Contradiction: The Decline of Sanctuary Privileges in England

Of all the crimes attributed to Richard of Gloucester, the removal of his nephew from the sanctuary of Westminster Abbey is very disturbing. This action causes many modern historians to contend that the usurper was willing to go to any lengths, including the violation of sanctuary, to achieve his own ends.[1] Gloucester marched into London with Prince Edward on 4 May 1483, proclaiming the Queen's family to be traitors and himself the Protector of the young Prince. Elizabeth Woodville withdrew with her family to the sanctuary at Westminster Abbey several nights before he arrived. As the preparations for the coronation proceeded, the widowed Queen remained in sanctuary, as if fearing for her children's safety. According to Sir Thomas More, Gloucester called a council to decide the best method for removing young Prince Richard from Westminster Abbey to join with his brother for the coronation.[2] Violating the sanctuary was an option suggested by the Duke of Buckingham.[3] In a speech More invented for Buckingham he described the awful condition of sanctuary, the crime and villainy that persisted there, and the reasons why it was appropriate to seize Prince Richard, who was portrayed as being kept there against his will. The ecclesiastical officials at court under the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury balked at jeopardizing the rights of sanctuary and offered to

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[1] Charles Ross, Richard III (California: U.C. Berkeley, 1981), 86-87. Also A.J. Pollard, Princes in the Tower (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 93. Ross and Pollard, two of the foremost historians of fifteenth-century England and Richard III, both maintained that Gloucester would have violated sanctuary to retrieve Prince Richard.

[2] Thomas More, History of King Richard III (1566) from The Complete Works of St. Thomas More. Edited by Richard S. Sylvester. Vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 25-33.

[3] Ibid., 32-33.

persuade Woodville in June 1483 to release the Prince voluntarily.[4]

According to More, Woodville was harassed, cajoled, and eventually persuaded to release Prince Richard with the threat her son would be physically removed if she did not consent:

> Truly madame, quod [the Archbishop], and the farther that you be to deliver him, the farther been other men to suffer you to keep him, lest your causeless fear might cause you further to convey him. And many be there that think that he can have no privilege in this place, which neither can have will to ask it, nor malice to deserve it. And therefore they reckon no privilege broken, though they fetch him out. Which if ye finally refuse to deliver him, I verily think they will.[5]

After Gloucester's usurpation and the presumed murder of his nephews, Woodville was portrayed by such sixteenth-century historians as Polydore Vergil, Thomas More, and Edward Hall as a victimized mother.[6] According to More, Woodville took her son in her arms and said:

> "But only one thing I beseech you for the trust that his father put in you ever, and for the trust that I put in you now, that as far as ye think that I fear too much, be you well aware that you fear not as far too little. And therewithal she said unto the child: farewell my own sweet son, god send you good keeping, let me kiss you once yet ere you go, for God knoweth when we shall kiss together again." And therewith she kissed him, and blessed him, turned her back and wept and went her way, leaving the child weaping as fast.[7]

Supposedly, she had trusted the envoys who persuaded her that the lives of her children were safe in her brother-in-law's hands. Yet despite the assurances, Gloucester had

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[4] Ibid., 27-28. More incorrectly wrote that the Archbishop of York was sent to the Queen in Westminster. It was Thomas Bourchier, Archbishop of Canterbury, who made the plea. See Richard Sylvester's commentary in The Complete Works of St. Thomas More. Edited by Richard S. Sylvester. Vol. 2. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), lxxix.

[5] More, History of Richard III, 37.

[6] See Polydore Vergil, Anglica Historia Books 23-25 (1534). (London: J. B. Nichols, 1846), 189-90. Add More, History of Richard III, 42; also Edward Hall, Hall's Chronicle (1550) (New York: AMS Press, 1965; reprint, London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1809), 379-80.

[7] More, History of Richard III, 42.

deliberately deceived his sister-in-law and by so doing made his usurpation virtually incontestable.

However, Polydore Vergil and Edward Hall recorded that well after Gloucester's usurpation and the presumed murder of her sons, he was able to convince Woodville to forget his crime and release her daughters from sanctuary too.[8] The Queen procured a public statement from Richard III in March 1484 promising that if her daughters would "come unto me out of the Sanctuary of Westminster and be guided, ruled, and demeaned after me, then I shall see that they shall be in surety of their lives, and also not suffer any manner hurt by any manner [of] person or persons to them or any of them or their bodies and persons."[9] It is unclear why Woodville accepted Richard III's offer and released her daughters from sanctuary, and why her son-in-law Henry VII chose to punish her for it following Lambert Simnel's rebellion.[10] The general consensus is that the Queen considered herself destitute of all hope, and that if she did not agree to Richard III's proposal, he would compel her to come out of sanctuary by force or starvation.[11]

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[8] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 210-11. Hall's Chronicle, 406-7. More's History of Richard III ends after the murder of the Princes.

[9] Henry Ellis, Original Letters, Illustrative of English History. Second Series. Vol. 1. (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 149. The original letter, found in fol. 238 of the Harleian Manuscript 433, went on to promise that Richard III would not imprison them in the Tower or allow anything "to be done by way of ravissement or defouling contrarie their willes." Richard III also promised to pay their dowries, offered generous marriage proposals, and vowed to treat them as his loving kinswomen.

[10] The Dictionary of National Biography (to 1900). Edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. Vol 6, s.v. "ELIZABETH, queen of Edward IV." (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937-8), 617.

[11] James Gairdner suggested that Elizabeth surrendered her daughters because her situation was "forlorn and comfortless," and that "it was impossible to say how long even the Sanctuary would be respected." Gairdner, Richard III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898), 167. David MacGibbon contended that since Richard III had the sanctuary surrounded, "there was nothing to prevent his cutting off supplies and starving the inmates." MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville (London: Arthur Barker Ltd., 1938), 180; also in Agnes Strickland, Lives of the Queens of England, Vol. 1 (New York: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1843), 639. Alison Weir declared Elizabeth to be both pragmatic and a realist: "It soon became alarmingly clear that the Sanctuary could no longer be regarded as a place of refuge, since Richard would obviously not hesitate to use force to remove her and her daughters if she resisted him." Alison Weir, The Princes in the Tower (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 194. Interestingly, neither Charles Ross nor A.J. Pollard addressed this issue in their biographies on Richard III. Kendall, however, used it to argue the idea that Elizabeth did not believe Richard III had killed her sons. See Kendall,

Considering these alternatives, it did not appear Woodville had an alternative other than to submit to her brother-in-law.

Woodville may have naively trusted Gloucester in regards to her son, because his pretense was credible. Prince Edward desired his brother's company and participation in the upcoming coronation. However, it is inconsistent with Woodville's character to believe that she would have repeated the same mistake after having already been victimized by Gloucester's deceit. The Protector had also promised to care for her sons. She knew from previous experience that his word was suspect. Two contemporary historians, Vergil and Hall, concluded that her actions were driven by her emotions, specifically her womanly "mutability."[12] Conversely, many modern historians attributed her action to the idea that Richard III would have forced her out of sanctuary by any means, even hunger. Yet these conclusions disagree with the scholarship on medieval and early modern sanctuary practices, especially relating to the sanctuary at Westminster Abbey.[13] The justification for the idea that Richard III would have broken the sanctuary privileges of Westminster is supported by the fact that he surrounded it with armed guards. Public rumor maintained that it was his intention to violate it.[14] There are understandable ambiguities and contradictions in the records, for only a few of the

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Richard III (London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1955), 490.

[12] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 210. Also Hall's Chronicle, 406-7.

[13] I owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. Paul Seaver of Stanford University for his recommendation of Gervase Rosser's Medieval Westminster 1200-1540 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Rosser's work contained the primary references to scholarship on sanctuary laws and practices in medieval and early modern England. See page 158, footnote 188. Isobel Thornley is considered the premier scholar on the demise of English Sanctuary. See her article 'The Destruction of Sanctuary' in Seton-Watson's Tudor Studies Presented by the Board of Studies in History in the University of London to Albert Frederick Pollard (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1924). See also Jo Ann Hoeppner Moran, review of Medieval Westminster, 1200-1540, by Gervase Rosser, In American Historical Review 97 (February 1992): 179-80.

[14] The two main accounts of Richard surrounding the sanctuary are found in Nicholas Pronay and John Cox, ed., The Crowland Chronicle Continuations 1459-1486 (London: Alan Sutton, 1986), 163. Also, More, History of King Richard III, 22. The rumors that Richard intended to break sanctuary by force are found in both More, History of King Richard III, 33, and Dominic Mancini, The Usurpation of Richard the Third (1483) trans. by C.A.J. Armstrong (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 89.

primary sources discuss it. Only two writers exist who were truly contemporary to the times of 1483, Dominic Mancini who wrote The Usurpation of Richard III, and the unknown author of the Croyland Chronicle.

The scholarship on sanctuary reveals that this special institution of protection in England was challenged from its inception, yet the monarchy consistently upheld and supported it. Though weakened by judges and renegade dukes, sanctuary held firm until after Richard III's death in 1485. Specifically, the Tudor kings earned the reputation for initiating the destruction of the franchises of sanctuary in England. Henry VIII did more to destroy sanctuary than his father. Yet despite their efforts, the sanctuary at Westminster Abbey was not officially abolished until 1623 by James I.[15] Sanctuary was a custom in England that had survived for centuries. Legally repealing it would take over a century, though in practice it lingered in episodes throughout the sixteenth century. Moreover, for centuries the abbots of Westminster Abbey had challenged any sheriff, judge, or king who tried to violate its significant franchise. By analyzing the history of sanctuary in England and examining aristocratic women in the fifteenth century who used it, there is no doubt that Richard III would not have risked excommunication and its inherent political devastation by forcibly removing Queen Elizabeth or any of her children from Westminster Abbey. Moreover, the situation of sanctuary in Westminster was such that it would have been impossible for Richard III to prevent food from reaching sanctuary without depriving the entire Abbey's numerous residents and affiliates. Though he may have threatened to violate sanctuary, Richard III never did.

[15] Both Rosser and Thornley verified that sanctuary was officially abolished in an Act of 1623 during 21 James I. See Seton-Watson, Tudor Studies, 207. In practice, however, sanctuary had been violated repeatedly throughout the sixteenth century.

Sanctuary in England, 1400-1600

William Caxton established the first printing press in England within the sanctuary of Westminster Abbey in 1475-76 because it protected his work from English laws and offered an ideal locale for distribution.[16] Caxton translated the French version of Jacobus de Varagine's The Golden Legend into English in 1470 and published it. These volumes relate the legends and myths of Saints lives. One of these included a legend concerning the founding of Westminster Abbey by St. Peter himself. Accounts of the origins of Westminster Abbey, such as the one found in The Golden Legend, were used by monasteries as proof of the franchise of sanctuary when they lacked documented evidence that they rightfully enjoyed the privilege.[17] The first bishop of London, Mellitus, was apparently commissioned by King Ethelbert to build a church in Westminster:

> Which Ethelbert made in London, within the city, a noble and royal church in the honour of S. Paul, in which S. Austin ordained S. Mellitus to be bishop of that city. Which king was not satisfied with that good deed, but thought and also did do make another church in the west end of the city, which then was called Thorney, and now is named Westminster, which church he prayed Mellitus for to hallow in the honour of St. Peter, and the night before that he had purposed to hallow it, St. Peter appeared to a fisher in Thames, and bade him set him over from Stangate to Westminster, and he prayed the fisher to abide him there till he came again, and he would well reward him for his labour.[18]

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[16] Rosser, Medieval Westminster, 209. The location for Caxton's printing press maximized his resources. He was close to the influence and patronage of court, residing nearby in Westminster Palace, while protected from censor by the independence of sanctuary privilege. One of his many patrons was Anthony Lord Rivers, Elizabeth Woodville's brother. See also MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville, 208-9, for Caxton's relationship with the Queen's family.

[17] Thornley, "Sanctuary in Medieval London", 308. Thornley wrote: "It is noteworthy that whenever the right [of sanctuary] had come in question, the abots had always relied for its defence on the charters of Edgar and St. Edward supported by immemorial usage." This means that the tradition of sanctuary at Westminster Abbey was sufficient without the legal 'paperwork' necessary to prove it.

[18] Jacobus de Varagine, The Golden Legend (1275) Vols. 6 & 7 (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 16.

The legend described that this fisherman witnessed "S. Peter enter into the church with a great light, which light endured as long as he was in the church."[19] St. Peter appeared again to the fisherman and convinced him to tell Mellitus: "I have hallowed the church of Westminster this night" and that if he did not believe it, he would find tokens throughout the abbey.[20] From that time afterward, according to the legend, Westminster Abbey was considered a holy place by St. Peter. Despite this "miracle" at Westminster, however, the lands of England belonged to the kings of England, not to St. Peter.

The fundamental clash between the authority of the king and that of the Church throughout the Middle Ages expressed itself in a variety of ways.[21] The Popes felt they were God's chosen representatives on the earth and had the right to speak for Him. The kings also believed they were divinely appointed; they were in fact "anointed" kings. According to the Golden Legend, the investiture of "protection" did not come from Mellitus or a fisherman or St. Peter, but from a pope. Edward the Confessor tore down the church around 1050 and funded the new structure with "livelihood" and "jewels." He then sent word to the pope, Nicholas II, who confirmed the privileges granted to Westminster Abbey and threatened excommunication to any man who took "any movable or immovable goods, or would take any man by force or strength out of that church or of the precinct of the same."[22] Though Nicholas II may have claimed the authority to vest

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 17.

[21] A good exposition on the interaction between the authority of the Church and its cooperation and confrontation with the monarchies of Europe is in Joseph Lynch's The Medieval Church: A Brief History (London: Longman, 1992), 315-31; Also, John A. F. Thomson, Popes and Princes, 1417-1517: Politics and Polity in the Late Medieval Church (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980); Robert Norman Swanson, Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215-c.1515 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Francis Oakley, The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

[22] Varagine, Golden Legend, 18-19.

property for holy use, in practice it required the king's authority to declare where the boundaries of sanctuary were.[23]

In medieval England, there were two forms of sanctuary rights. One was limited and the other complex. Any church or parish had the right to grant sanctuary to criminals or those seeking protection. This protection was temporary, lasting up to forty days. During a criminal's stay in sanctuary, he or she could summon a coroner, confess any crime committed, and then "abjure" the realm, choosing voluntary exile rather than the punishment for the offense. Abjuration came into practice in the thirteenth century. Those who abjured were protected during their transit from the sanctuary to a port. Dover was the most common destination as it had regular outbound ships to France or Flanders. Abjuration is considered an English custom, one that was not consistently practiced on the Continent.[24] If the felon decided against self-exile, the king's officers could physically remove and bring them to justice after forty days. Another method for inducing felons to surrender, was to withhold food and starve them out.[25] The second practice of seeking sanctuary had a deeper and more permanent duration. It was, in fact, an "independence of royal justice," the highest exemption a king could grant. This right became as secure as if one crossed the borders of another country, where the king had no authority. Its effects were permanent so long as the individual remained within the

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[23] Seton-Watson, Tudor Studies, 183. Isobel Thornley's article 'The Destruction of Sanctuary' in Tudor Studies acknowledged that a "sanctuary" was every "franchise where the lord had *iura regalia* and the King's writ did not run." Thus not only was Westminster Abbey a sanctuary, but also the earldoms of Durham, Chester, and Lancaster, each having been made autonomous by a King of England.

[24] J. Charles Cox, The Sanctuaries and Sanctuary Seekers of Medieval England (London: George Allen & Sons, 1911), 10-12. I am indebted to Thornley for this reference. See also Isobel Thornley's article on sanctuary and abjuration, "Sanctuary in Medieval London" Journal of the British Archaeological Association 38 (1932-1933): 293-315.

[25] Seton-Watson, Tudor Studies, 182-83. See also Goldberg, Women in England c. 1275-1525 (Manchester, 1995), 40. The tactic of starvation only applied to the first kind of sanctuary. A contemporary document known as the Mirror of Justice prescribed withholding food to sanctuary inmates who refused to withdraw after the forty days. See Cox, Sanctuary Seekers, 22-25. Westminster Abbey's sanctuary possessed the most encompassing privilege possible in England. See note 33 below.

boundaries of the sanctuary. Officers could not pursue and detain the person, and if they did they so, they were forced by the king's law to release the individual. Under this new relationship, the felon or individual seeking sanctuary no longer owed allegiance to the king. He or she swore fealty to the lord or abbot of the property, creating a unique form of medieval authority.[26] Not surprisingly, this degree of freedom also acquired a high degree of infamy, for many seeking sanctuary were guilty of serious crimes.[27]

There were various reasons and situations which compelled men or women to seek permanent privileges of sanctuary. In some instances, it was economical for shop-keepers or workers to submit to the authority of the abbot or archdeacon presiding over the sanctuary, as happened at Westminster Abbey.[28] Moreover, those who needed sanctuary to keep the king's bailiffs away and themselves out of prison or safe from execution had no qualms about swearing new allegiances. Thus those who had murdered, robbed, or committed any number of offenses could be freed from any punishment within these special walls. Debtors were common inmates.[29] There were laws within the sanctuary communities, but a felon who sinned against his abbot could also flee to another sanctuary--assuming they were not arrested upon exiting the boundaries. The majority of recorded criminal cases concerned men, and these protected criminals were referred to as "sanctuary men."[30] However, women too needed the safety of sanctuary on

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[26] Seton-Watson, Tudor Studies, 182-83.

[27] More, History of Richard III, 30.

[28] Rosser, Medieval Westminster, 155-56. Rosser reported the case of a butcher in 1391 who worked a shop within the sanctuary and swore an oath of fealty to the archdeacon, who then supervised his trade. Unfortunately, without the guild restraints or inspections, the quality of goods coming from sanctuaries (especially St. Martin's) became notoriously poor. See also Seton-Watson, Tudor Studies, 193.

[29] Rosser, Medieval Westminster, 156-57. Rosser tells of John Saddler and his wife who were convicted of fraud in 1421 and claimed the right of sanctuary in Westminster Abbey for eighteen years. Another man, John Baron, spurned his creditors by moving to sanctuary in Westminster and continuing his business from within. The law could not touch either them or their property while they were inside.

[30] Seton-Watson, Tudor Studies, 186. The "sanctuary men" from St. Martin-le-Grand raided the city of London in 1455 and 1456 on the pretext of joining the riots during the civil war. During Lambert Simnel's rebellion in 1487, the sanctuary men from Westminster plundered the houses of those they knew

occasion. In one case, Elizabeth Nelson of Pollington took sanctuary in 1511: "12th day of March in the second year of the reign of King Henry the Eighth, Elizabeth Nelson of Pollington in the country of York, spinster, came to the peace of St John of Beverley for felony and the murder of her child killed at Hull, and she was admitted and sworn."[31] Aside from criminals and businessmen, it was common in England for the losing side of a battle to flee for the nearest sanctuary rather than face the awful punishment for treason. This was especially true during the Wars of the Roses when the English crown changed hands between the Yorkists and the Lancastrians.[32] Interestingly, the fits of anarchy these changeovers caused often damaged the benefits of those in sanctuary. Legal authorities, specifically in London, periodically used these opportunities to violate sanctuary and prosecute criminals in court.

The unlimited protection that some sanctuaries were authorized to provide was not absolute throughout the Middle Ages. Around the close of the fourteenth century, it was challenged by local law, yet the cases were appealed by ecclesiastical authorities to the king. Richard II's support proved pivotal in allowing the practice to survive the complaints that rose against it when he confirmed Westminster's privileges in 1388.[33]

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to be fighting. The new Tudor king, however, was not as lenient as previous kings and began punishing them.

[31] P.J.P. Goldberg, ed., Women in England c.1275-1525 (Manchester, 1995), 238. This is from the sanctuary register of Beverley, translated by Goldberg from Sanctuarium Dunelmense et Sanctuarium Beverlacense (Surtees Society, 1837). Another woman from Kent abjured the realm in 1313 rather than face execution for theft: "A woman condemned for larceny and found to be pregnant was committed to prison until she gave birth. Afterwards she broke prison and fled to a church and was extricated from the church by the gaolkeeper and taken before the justices. It was decided that she be taken back to the church and afterwards she abjured the realm and the keeper [was put] under judgement." Goldberg, Women in England, 238-39.

[32] When Edward IV was forced to flee England in 1470, many of his knights took sanctuary in St. Martin-le-Grand or Westminster Abbey. They played a decisive role in London upon his return the following year. See Philippe de Commynes, The Memoirs of Philippe de Commynes, Vol. 1 (London: Henry Boln, 1855), 194-95. After the Battle of Bosworth Field, Richard III's friend Lord Lovell fled to the sanctuary of St. John in Colchester. See Vergil, Anglica Historia, 224-25.

[33] Rosser, Medieval Westminster, 218. Rosser acquired this information from the translation of The Westminster Chronicle 1381-1394, edited and translated by L.C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey

The challengers during Richard II's time consisted of dukes and nobles who argued that sanctuary should not protect those guilty of treason. Richard II supported the Abbot of Westminster against the Duke of Gloucester, Thomas of Woodstock, and others who broke sanctuary by wrongfully ejecting a man who had received shelter there. However, the fifteenth century marked a change in the popular attitude toward sanctuary. After Richard II extended sanctuary's right to protect debtors, local law enforcement complained about the impact the increased number of debtors who sought sanctuary. The city fathers of London decided to address matters on their own authority, despite the franchises of protection at monasteries like Westminster and St. Martin-le-Grand. They decided that the right of sanctuary was counterfeit and sent officers to carry out arrest orders within sanctuary.[34] Despite their willingness to break sanctuary and risk excommunication, the city government was forced to back down by the royal authority. Medieval kings like Richard II were prompted to support sanctuary by the political necessity of maintaining a strong relationship with the Church. The authority of the local government could not supersede such an alliance for very long.[35] The Lancastrian kings --Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI--supported the practice of sanctuary, though London

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(Oxford, 1982), xxxii. The sanctuary at Westminster Abbey was granted the additional privilege of offering asylum to debtors under Richard II. This created controversy over the practice in general and caused an influx of sanctuary seekers who were in debt. See also Thornley, "Sanctuary in Medieval London," 303.

[34] Seton-Watson, Tudor Studies, 189. In 1430, two canons were dragged from St. Martin's by the mayor of London, sheriffs and four sergeants. However, despite the violation, Henry VI would not go against the authority of the church and commenced an investigation of the matter. He ordered the prisoners to be restored to sanctuary until the matter had been settled--an order the mayor did not obey.

[35] Ibid., 189-90. Though the City of London legally extricated the two canons from St. Martin's in 1430, they were forced again to face the issue in 1434 when a debtor was returned to sanctuary after being forcibly removed. In 1440 another incident further weakened the City's policy of extradition when four "sanctuary men" rescued a soldier as he was being taken to his trial. Two sheriffs arrested all five men and imprisoned them at Newgate. When the dean of St. Martin's was delayed by the City officials, he appealed the case to the king who angrily ordered the city to restore the prisoners back to sanctuary. Though the City still balked, the issue was resolved in the Star Chamber, written on letters patent, thus confirming St. Martin's privileges even more solidly.

authorities continually fought against it, especially during Henry VI's lapses of sanity. After each conflict, writs or statements of approval were added to the sanctuary's records, increasing their documentation and defending their rights.[36]

However, the Londoners ignored the rulings and continued to break sanctuary privileges. During the Wars of the Roses, neither the Yorkists nor Lancastrians dared offend the Londoners, and the practice of sanctuary weakened near the end of Henry VI's reign. Yet the monarchy continued to support the Church even though the grievances of sanctuary abuses increased. During Henry VII's first parliament, the House of Commons directed their grievances about sanctuary to the Abbot of Westminster, showing that the issue was still unsettled. Aside from the monarchies of Henry VII and Henry VIII, the judges did the most to curb the abuses of sanctuaries.[37] This was due to the strong written tradition the judges upheld, allowing them to utilize previous cases in handling sanctuary violations. Also, by demanding to see physical evidence of an abbey's rights, like a charter or a grant privilege, they were successful at stripping away many privileges that were held by tradition only. Thus by Henry VIII's reign, only sanctuaries able to show a royal grant could claim any privileges.[38] In addition, judges also began establishing appropriate conditions for receiving sanctuary. For instance, they would define the sanctuary's boundaries to a church, cloister, or cemetery. Excluded would be such sites as gardens, barns, and stables.[39] In the third year of Henry VII's reign, judges also

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[36] Ibid., 192.

[37] Ibid., 197. Thornley wrote: "But the most successful campaign against sanctuary before the break with Rome was that carried on by the judges."

[38] Ibid. Writs, charters, or even papal bulls were not considered adequate evidence of sanctuary privileges. Thus sanctuaries that had held privileges by practice were lost as well as those which had received their privileges by court rulings.

[39] Ibid., 198. Thornley insisted this strictly limited the bending of sanctuary rules and offered more opportunities for law enforcement to reach a criminal before "officially" receiving sanctuary. Thus any man or woman taking a walk in the abbey's gardens was susceptible to arrest. This helped prevent new forms of sanctuary violations from being invented by those in sanctuary.

required a man or woman to confess to committing a felony in order to receive the rights of sanctuary. People were no longer allowed to take sanctuary because they thought their life was in danger.[40] A very damaging case to the practice of sanctuary came in 1486 during the first year of Henry VII's reign. The sanctuary at Culham was broken because it did not contain the express right to harbor those guilty of treason, even though the church had a royal charter giving it sanctuary privilege.[41] Henry VII's interest in this case revealed that early in his reign he did not intend to use his royal authority to protect violations of the law through the practice of sanctuary as previous English kings had done. However, the charter of Westminster Abbey expressly covered all crimes.[42] It was the most powerful sanctuary in England, both in practice and by right. Its unique geography and unrestricted rights made it a formidable opponent to those seeking to challenge the authority of the Church.

Westminster Abbey

The fourteenth-century belfry of Westminster Abbey was taken down in 1750, at which

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[40] Ibid. Chief Justice Babington ruled that "it was useless for a felon to plead that he had been taken out of a *county palatine*; unless the plea was made that he had been taken out of *sanctuary*, he would be hanged." [italics added]. Thornley explained that another limiting factor included the timing of a crime: "And during Henry VIII's reign the courts upheld at least twice the rule that a man who dealt another a mortal wound, fled to a church, and was taken from it before his victim died, could not enjoy the privilege, since what he had done was not yet a felony at the time of his taking sanctuary."

[41] Ibid., 199. The case in 1486 involved the rebel Humphrey Stafford.

[42] J. Armitage Robinson, Gilbert Crispin: Abbot of Westminster (Cambridge, 1911), 162. I owe gratitude again to Rosser for citing Robinson's book. Robinson proposed that the charter of Westminster was altered to include more privileges than it originally was granted. This came to light when it was discovered that the charter of Colchester was forged and its principle source was the original Westminster charter. However, after the forgery, Westminster's was altered, making it more inclusive in its privileges. Westminster's charter was examined and significant alterations in the text were detectable. It is probable that the alteration happened in the latter fourteenth century before Richard II validated Westminster's privileges. For excerpts from the Westminster and Colchester charters, see Robinson, Gilbert Crispin, 163-4. See also Thornley, "Sanctuary In Medieval London," 300, 308.

time William Stukeley drew it and incorrectly identified it as 'the sanctuary.'[43] The sanctuary of Westminster was not limited to the walls of the abbey, nor was it a special shrine within its gardens. It is best described as the neighborhood the sacrists of Westminster Abbey built to attract additional funds to support the monastery. In the process, it became part of the monastery and shared in its privileges.[44] At the end of the thirteenth century, the sacrists of Westminster Abbey began leasing land around its walls for commercial use. It began with one empty lot near the monastery at Charing Cross, which the sacrists turned into a row of shops. The earnings from the rents went back to the Abbey and proved to be financially beneficial. Rosser described the program of building that began in the early fifteenth century which penetrated the sanctuary itself.[45] When the fair of St. Edward began to be held inside the Abbey, an interesting transformation occurred: "But with the advent of the annual fair of St Edward there began the commercial development of the monastic precinct which, in the following centuries, was to populate the sacred ground with bakers and butchers, bureaucrats and tavern-keepers, to the great profit of the religious."[46] The majority of the development happened

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[43] Rosser, Medieval Westminster, 66, footnote 112. Stukeley's article, "The Sanctuary at Westminster" was published in Archaeologia I(1770), 39-44. Cox declared that Stukeley invented the term 'sanctuary' to describe the belfry out of his own imagination. See Cox, Sanctuary Seekers, 49. The sanctuary of Westminster Abbey was not contained within the belfry. Rather, it extended beyond the original structure of the abbey and was a great market center in the fourteenth century.

[44] The economic development of Westminster Abbey is best related in Rosser, Medieval Westminster, ch. 3, pages 44-96, which he derived from the Westminster Abbey Muniments. The financial dealings of the monks, combined with the special privileges granted by the English monarchs in the thirteenth century, created the unique sanctuary of Westminster, along with its accompanying problems. Cox wrote: "The fact is that at Westminster, as in other specially privileged houses, the whole precincts possessed the powers of immunity." Cox, Sanctuary Seekers, 50. See also W.R. Lethaby, Westminster Abbey & the Kings' Craftsmen: A Study of Mediaeval Building (New York, 1971), 58. Lethaby wrote: "The Abbey church, with its whole Close, was the Sanctuary. When the monastery built houses within the Close, the tenements enjoyed its privileges."

[45] Rosser, Medieval Westminster, 67. Rosser wrote: "Although periodic trading is likely to have preceded the holding of St Edward's fair within the abbey precinct, permanent secular buildings are not known to have existed there before the late thirteenth century."

[46] Ibid., 67.

within the domain of the sacrist, who enjoyed the high yielding profits. When the usage of the land for the fairs began to ebb, permanent houses were built along with rooms for local businesses. These domestic houses within the sanctuary, both "large" and "small," yielded up to £80 a year in rents. This community within a community was thriving by 1400.[47]

The economic expansion of Westminster Abbey was not a venture taken by merchants but by the monks themselves.[48] Thus, the sanctuary of Westminster Abbey also extended its influence into the surrounding neighborhood as additional property was purchased and housing erected. This surge in the fourteenth century was the result of a population increase in the city of Westminster. The demand for space yielded the funds to respond to the population surge by adding additional buildings. However, in the fifteenth century, the situation reversed. The population of Westminster decreased, taking with it the demand for property and the rents that such a demand had produced.[49] Empty stalls and houses littered the walls of the Abbey. The value of the rents steadily decreased, reaching a dismal low between 1450 and the mid-1480s.[50] The fifteenth century may not have been the ideal century for business in Westminster, but the sanctuary was busy for other reasons. It was the abode for crippled veterans, heretics, wizards, thieves, and debtors:

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[47] Ibid., 68. The lease records for the lands were not well-kept until the mid fifteenth-century, though there are records dating back a full century previously.

[48] Ibid., 69. Land was the great asset that the monks of Westminster Abbey utilized. For example, when the Tothill Street gate of the abbey was rebuilt, the cellarer constructed additional shops outside and within the gateway itself. Also, the almoners commissioned shops to be built outside the almonry along the walls, yielding significant income.

[49] Ibid., 74. Rosser attributed this to the population decline during the fifteenth century. The absence of rents made it financially impractical to continue building.

[50] Ibid., 75. Rosser wrote: "Between 1450 and the mid-1480s, indeed, the houses for the most part stood untenanted: *nihil quia vacua* is the telling refrain of the rentals." The monks maintained financial solvency, yet their income was drastically reduced by the loss of the rents. Recovery did not come until the sixteenth century. For more information on the abbey's financial crises, see also V. H. Galbraith, "A Visitation of Westminster in 1444," English Historical Review 37 (1922), 83-88.

> Here was the demobilized soldier, 'Thomas Glasebrook of Westminster, that hath been in the wars in France with King Harry the Fifth', in which he suffered crippling crossbow-bolt and spear wounds, now, together with his wife, dependent for his living upon a licence to beg in the streets of Westminster. Here was the professional horse-thief, William Burgh, 'an old tramp who travels the roads like a beggar', haunting the western approach routes to London to catch his prey at Knightbridge, Tothill, and Charing. Here too, in the sanctuary, was a wizard who claimed to conjure the devil by his arts, and who drove his unwilling youthful accomplice insane for fear.[51]

Westminster Abbey's highly privileged sanctuary drew a colorful blend of humanity. Unlike the neighboring City of London, Westminster did not have "the anonymity of the modern city."[52] However, the protective shield that the sanctuary provided was available to anyone, male or female, by swearing the sanctuary oath.[53] This made Westminster Abbey an autonomous realm within the hegemony of medieval kings.

Westminster Abbey was as much a kingdom as the one governed down the street at nearby Westminster Palace. It was the locale for medieval coronations, it protected those hunted by the laws, and it was large enough to sustain a significant population of criminals, beggars, those destitute of hope, and also those shrewd enough to take advantage of its protection for profit, like William Caxton. Its privileges were challenged during the height of its financial security at the end of the fourteenth century yet were supported and maintained by the kings of England. Though the judges and mayors of London fought against the privileges throughout the fifteenth century, they were still in force and available to those in the latter end of the century. Any duke, mayor, or sheriff

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[51] Ibid., 219. Rosser obtained these examples from the Public Record Office and listed his sources in the footnotes.

[52] Ibid., 218.

[53] Cox, Sanctuary Seekers, 70-71. "He was called upon to swear truthfully why he came, to promise to behave properly and faithfully whilst there, to submit to all corrections and judgements of the president, to observe all contracts which he might make whilst in sanctuary, if a debtor to satisfy his creditors at the earliest opportunity, not to sell victuals in sanctuary without special leave of the archdeacon, not to carry any defensive weapons, not to leave sanctuary without permission, not to defame in any way his fellow fugitives, and finally not to do or permit any violence within the precincts."

attempting to challenge the sovereignty of the sanctuary at Westminster would have been confronted by the monk-archdeacon of Westminster itself. Other sanctuaries in England exercised similar privileges if they could prove them. It was a well-known practice during the Wars of the Roses and during Gloucester's usurpation as well.

Sanctuary and Richard III

In addition to the evidence left in legal records and monastery registers, contemporary writers also left descriptions of sanctuary practices in England. Thomas More's History of King Richard the Third is a valuable source about the perception of city officials concerning the freedom sanctuary afforded criminals. A speech invented by More for the Duke of Buckingham reveals that Gloucester and Buckingham considered the sanctuary at Westminster Abbey a place of crime and social disorder:

> What a rabble of thieves, murderers, and malicious heinous traitors, and that in two places specially: The one at the elbow of the City [Westminster], the other in the very bowels [St Martin-le-Grand] . . . Now unthrifts riot and run in debt, upon the boldness of these places; yea and rich women run thither with their husbands' plate, and say, they dare not abide with their husbands for beating. Thieves bring thither their stolen goods, and there live theron. There devise they new robberies; nightly they steal out; they rob and reve [plunder] and kill, and come in again as though those places gave them not only a safeguard for the harm they have done, but a licence also to do more.[54]

More used this commentary on sanctuary abuses to legitimize Gloucester's and Buckingham's desire to break the sanctuary rights of Westminster and seize Prince Richard from Woodville's custody. Yet More's account was written in the early sixteenth century. Following the Battle of Bosworth, Henry VII supported the violation of sanctuary on several occasions, creating a different political climate during More's

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[54] Thomas More, The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, edited by Richard S. Sylvester. Vol. 2 (Yale, 1963), 30-31. Quoted from Rosser, Medieval Westminster, 218-19 with modernized spelling.

time than had existed during Gloucester's. Considering that More himself was an undersheriff in London, it is not surprising that he had contempt for the "sanctuary men" of Westminster and St. Martin-le-Grand. However, it is probable that More inserted his biases against sanctuary and that his report does not reflect a time in London nearly twenty years before his own. As undersheriff, it is likely he experienced the crimes committed by the outlaw residents of sanctuary.

Fortunately, More was not the only contemporary of the fifteenth century that left an account of sanctuary practices. Dominic Mancini, an Italian visitor who lived in London during Gloucester's usurpation, wrote a letter to the archbishop of Vienne in December 1483 describing the English practice of sanctuary:

> In England these places of refuge are of ancient observance, so that up to those times, either from religious awe or from fear of the people, none had dared to violate them. For whatever reason a man may be accused or disliked, it is not lawful even for kings to drag him thence against his will. In the same sanctuary the queen [Woodville] had given birth to the young Edward [V] when King Edward [IV] had been ejected following the occupation of the realm by Henry [VI], with whom he was contending for the crown. Nevertheless no violence was done to the queen by King Henry [VI], who at that time had everything under his control. Since then, whether religion has declined, or the people's power diminished and that of the sovereigns vastly increased, sanctuaries are of little avail against the royal authority.[55]

Mancini's assertion that sanctuary was "of little avail against the royal authority" was not prophetical because sanctuary survived another century. It did show, however, that its violation was a concern in 1483. The foreign observer's account contains two significant errors. While Mancini was correct in declaring that Woodville was safely ensconced in

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[55] Dominic Mancini, The Usurpation of Richard the Third (1483) trans. by C.A.J. Armstrong (Oxford, 1969), 79-81. Mancini dated his letter to the archbishop of Vienne, Angelo Cato, 1 December 1483. Mancini's letter was written in Latin and translated by C.A.J. Armstrong before he published it in 1934. Armstrong believed that the Mancini letter was incontrovertible of Richard III's guilt, though its facts are not entirely accurate. See Armstrong's article, "The Crimes of Richard III" The Times (London), 26 May 1934, 13-14.

sanctuary during her husband's exile, he was mistaken that the sanctuary at Westminster had never been violated or that the practice of sanctuary was "of little avail against the royal authority" in 1483.

When Henry VI returned to power in 1470, he declared sanctuary inviolable. This announcement maintains the privileges of Westminster's sanctuary confirms one of Mancini's statements. The Common Council minutes of 1 October 1470, noted that Woodville had received sanctuary at Westminster. Afterwards, she sent the Abbot of Westminster to the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London to deliver the Tower to their control. Woodville did so fearing that rebels in Kent would desecrate sanctuary and kill her if she did not.[56] When Henry VI was liberated by Warwick, he proclaimed that:

> No man, of what degree or condition so ever he be, presume attempt or be so hardy to defoul or distrouble the churches or holy places of sanctuaries of Westminster and Saint Martin's within the city of London or elsewhere, neither vex, trouble, spoil, rob, damage, or hurt any minister, servant, inhabitant, or sojournant within the said holy places in their bodies or goods, movable or immovable, for any manner cause or quarrel old or new, contrary to our said sovereign lord's laws and his peace, upon pain of death.[57]

This evidence supports Mancini's assertion that Woodville was safe within sanctuary. However, other evidence contradicts his assertions that sanctuary had always been inviolable and that its protection expired in 1483. For instance, the Westminster

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[56] Many thanks to David MacGibbon for the bibliography of this account. Reginald Sharpe, London and the Kingdom (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1895), 385-6. "Be it remembered that on the 1st day of October it was noised abroad throughout the city that Edward the Fourth King of England had fled, for which cause the Queen Elizabeth who had fortified the Tower of London quitted the same Tower and fled to the sanctuary at Westminster and sent the Abbot of Westminster to Richard Lee the Mayor and the Aldermen to inform them on the Queen's behalf that the men of Kent and many others from divers parts of England in great numbers were purposing to enter the city and lay siege to the said Tower and the men at arms whom the said Queen had left behind in the same Tower; that the same Queen desired that the said Tower should be delivered into the hands of the Mayor and Aldermen because the said Queen was afraid, it was said, that unless the said Tower was so surrendered the said Kentishmen and others would invade the said sanctuary of Westminster to despoil and kill the said Queen."

[57] This is from Harleian MS. 543, f. 172 as quoted in Cora Scofield's article "Elizabeth Woodville in the Sanctuary at Westminster, 1470," English Historical Review 24 (January 1909): 90. This was also included in MacGibbon's sources which I used to track down the article.

Chronicle reveals that the privilege of sanctuary was defied and threatened a century before Gloucester's usurpation. In 1388 the Duke of Gloucester, Thomas Woodstock, arrested Robert Tresilian from sanctuary and executed him:

> But at this point the unexpected news arrived that Robert Tresilian was in the sanctuary of Westminster; and the lords speedily dropped everything else for the moment to hurry there, accompanied by a densely packed crowd: taking a mace, the duke of Gloucester forthwith arrested Robert Tresilian and shielded him from those who were making savage efforts to set upon him.[58]

Robert Tresilian was made chief justice of the king's bench under Richard II on 22 June 1381. He participated in the trials following the peasant's revolt. In 1387, he was accused of treason by Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, and other lords appellant, and instead of facing the charge, he took flight and hid in sanctuary.[59] Even though Tresilian was forcibly removed from sanctuary, the Westminster Chronicle recorded that his accusers asked if sanctuary protected traitors. Tresilian replied that it did: "They were at pains to ask him whether the sanctuary of St. Peter, Westminster, gave immunity to a traitor against the king and the realm: he answered steadily that it did, since it was for such offenders in particular that the privilege had been conferred upon the church of Westminster."[60] The burden of proof then fell on the Abbot of Westminster to justify the sanctuary's privileges. Unfortunately, Gloucester executed Tresilian before this could be done.

The Westminster Chronicle shows that the violation of Westminster happened a century before Gloucester's usurpation, and it refers to the consequences associated with it. It maintains that, "the king sent on 18 April [1388] for the charters and evidences of

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[58] The Westminster Chronicle 1381-1394, edited and translated by L.C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 311. My appreciation to Rosser for this account.

[59] The Dictionary of National Biography (to 1900), edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. Vol 19 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937-8), 1133-34. Also Elizabeth Hallam, ed., The Plantagenet Encyclopedia (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 196.

[60] The Westminster Chronicle, 313.

Westminster's privileges to be brought to Kennington, where they were read by his order in the hearing of the chancellor, the bishop of Winchester, Sir John Devereux, the king's steward, and other prominent persons in attendance."[61] The monks of Westminster Abbey proved their rights of sanctuary and were confirmed by Richard II, who "maintained that all those who had dragged Robert Tresilian out of the sanctuary of St. Peter, Westminster, together with those who had acquiesced or taken part in the act, were involved forthwith in a sentence of excommunication."[62] The power of the Church in regard to sanctuary was formidable, yet not invincible. Mancini was wrong to presume, from whatever source in London he learned it from, that the sanctuary of Westminster had never been violated.[63] Sanctuary was not abolished from Westminster until 1623 and its privileges were not seriously jeopardized until Henry VIII's reign. However, Mancini's record also includes a rumor circulating in London that Gloucester may have considered breaching Westminster to take Prince Richard.

Consequently, the question arises as to whether the duke of Gloucester intended to violate sanctuary in 1483. The issue of Westminster's privileges had been argued and decided a century earlier. Gloucester knew that Westminster Abbey possessed the most

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[61] Ibid., 324-5. The editors of this volume indicated on page 324 n.4: "The privilege of sanctuary at Westminster rested on putative charters of Edgar and Edward the Confessor, which granted life and limb, but not explicitly possessions, to offenders against the king and the king's majesty. In 1378, after discussion in parliament, fraudulent debt and trespass were excepted from the scope of sanctuary at the Abbey, but the privilege in cases of felony was confirmed. Thus in 1388 the monks had a good case. The content and vocabulary of the above passage suggest that the Monk had a written source, the work of someone well versed in the legal technicalities; very likely he had the entire dossier which the monks of Westminster took to Kennington in 1388."

[62] Ibid., 327. Excommunication was the punishment outlined in Varagine's The Golden Legend for the violation of sanctuary as well. Defeated by the Church, the Duke of Gloucester in 1388 was forced to seek pardon: "The duke of Gloucester an Sir John Cobham had it heavily on their consciences that they had dragged Robert Tresilian by force out of the Westminster sanctuary. They came on 15 May and submitted themselves to the abbot, promising to make satisfaction so far as lay in their power." Ibid., 333.

[63] A.J. Pollard analyzed Mancini's sources in "Dominic Mancini's Narrative of the Events of 1483." Nottingham Medieval Studies 38 (October 1994): 152-63. Mancini was present in London during the usurpation of Gloucester, though most of his sources were unnamed.

liberal privileges of all the sanctuaries in England. Considering that the entire realm was focused on the issue of the Edward V's coronation and his desire for Prince Richard to be in attendance, it is improbable to consider that Gloucester would have succeeded in persuading anyone that force could be used to drag a child from the protective custody of sanctuary. More and Mancini, however, argue the opposite. In a speech invented for Buckingham, More wrote:

> "Verily," quod the duke, "I think you say very truth. And what if a man's wife will take sanctuary because she list to run from her husband? I would ween if she can allege none other cause, he may lawfully, without any displeasure to Saint Peter, take her out of Saint Peter's church by the arm. And if nobody may be taken out of sanctuary that sayeth he will bide there, then if a child will take sanctuary because he feareth to go to school, his master must let him alone. And as simple as that sample is, yet is there less reason in our case than in that."[64]

More considered this argument sufficient to persuade his readers of Gloucester's desire to break sanctuary. Yet More was not alone in arguing this point. Mancini's letter revealed that contemporaries of Richard's day believed it was his intent to violate sanctuary:

> Wherefore, [Richard] said that, since this boy was held by his mother against his will in sanctuary, he should be liberated, because the sanctuary had been founded by their ancestors as a place of refuge, not of detention, and this boy wanted to be with his brother. Therefore with the consent of the council he surrounded the sanctuary with troops. When the queen saw herself besieged and preparation for violence, she surrendered her son, trusting in the word of the cardinal of Canterbury, that the boy should be restored after the coronation.[65]

One might presume from these two sources that the Duke did intend to violate sanctuary. However, neither More nor Mancini revealed their sources, and it is reasonable to believe they received this impression from secondary witnesses. The politics in London in 1483 were incredibly partisan, with factions supporting the Queen, William Hastings, and Gloucester. Mancini's letter to the archbishop of Vienne clearly reveals the level of

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[64] More, History of Richard III, 33.

[65] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 89.

restlessness and uncertainty that existed in England during the time of the usurpation. That Mancini chose to credit the reports unfavorable to Richard is not suitable evidence of guilt, especially when a contemporary record revealed that Woodville released her son voluntarily. Though Mancini's evidence appears damning to Gloucester, one must still remember that the Italian visitor did not claim to have any first-hand information from any of the participants involved in removing the Prince from sanctuary. Rather, he reported what he heard in London. Considering the unrest in England in 1483, it is not surprising to find Mancini recording nearly every positive and negative impression he received of the duke. His personal view, however, was against the usurper and he tended to credit the accusations more than the accolades.

This argument is especially relevant considering the account of Gloucester's usurpation found in the Croyland Chronicle. Though the puzzle of the authorship of the Croyland account has not been solved, it is generally agreed that the author was a major participant in the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III.[66] He was someone who had intimate knowledge of the events and did not overtly approve of Richard's takeover. It was written approximately in the spring of 1486, not long after the Battle of Bosworth. The timing of the document suggests the author had no reason to placate the dead monarch and could be free with his words.[67] His account of Prince Richard's removal from sanctuary is tellingly different than More's and Mancini's:

> The following Monday they came by boat to Westminster with a great crowd, with swords and clubs and compelled the Lord Cardinal of Canterbury to enter the sanctuary, with many others, to call upon the queen, in her kindness, to allow her son Richard, duke of York, to leave and come to the Tower for the comfort

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[66] See Nicholas Pronay and John Cox, "*Ille Qui Hanc Historiam Compilavit* - The Riddle of Authorship" in the introduction to The Crowland Chronicle Continuations 1459-1486 (London, 1986), 78-98.

[67] Ibid., 133. The author claimed that he was "speaking freely and without knowingly including any falsehood."

> of his brother, the king. She willingly agreed to the proposal and sent out the boy who was taken by the Lord Cardinal to the king in the Tower of London.[68]

The author of the Croyland Chronicle, likely an ecclesiastic, would have castigated Gloucester if he had attempted to break sanctuary. The Duke considered the consequences of such an action, yet if his intent was bring his nephew under his control to secure his own attempt at the throne, as Mancini and More argue, he would not have risked confrontation with the Church, especially knowing that he could never be crowned king in Westminster without its validation. Even Gloucester's detractors recognized his piety and devotion to the Church.[69] As powerful as the Protector was in England, he would not have survived the political damage excommunication would have caused him.

The willing removal of Prince Richard from sanctuary is crucial to understanding the usurpation of Gloucester and Woodville's role in provoking it. Historians have argued that the Queen sought sanctuary at Westminster to protect her children. These maternal motives should be examined from the perspective of sanctuary privileges granted to aristocratic women in fifteenth-century England. Once Woodville released her son, why did she remain in sanctuary? Prince Richard was summoned, according to Gloucester, to participate in his brother's coronation. It is peculiar that Woodville, the Queen Dowager, would intentionally absent herself from her son's coronation. If she truly doubted that the coronation was going to happen, she did not have to release Prince Richard. If she did believe her son was about to become king, the only reason to remain in sanctuary would be if she felt sufficient personal enmity between herself and the king's

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[68] Ibid., 159. Pronay's and Cox's translation from the Latin is commendable: "Die Lunae sequenti venerunt eum multitudine maxima navigio advecti usque ad Westmonasterium cum gladiis et fustibus et cogentes dominum cardinalem Cantuariensem, cum aliis multis, intrare sanctuarium ad interpellandum *benevolentiam reginae* ut filium suum Richardum, ducem Eboraci, permitteret exire venireque ad Turrim pro solatio regis fratris sui." Italics added for emphasis.

[69] Charles Ross' research on Richard III's piety and devotion to the Church is telling, both before his usurpation and after, considering that Ross believed him capable of committing political murder to remove his nephews. See Ross, Richard III, 128-30.

Protector to consider her own life in jeopardy.[70] The following section will show that in several situations elite women in the latter decades of the fifteenth century, like Woodville, sought asylum in sanctuary to protect themselves from their enemies.

Elite Women in Sanctuary

Numerous motives prompted individuals to seek sanctuary in the fifteenth century. Most involved those seeking to escape the legal punishment for their crimes. For example, Lord Francis Lovell, one of Gloucester's friends, fled after the Battle of Bosworth to sanctuary in Colchester.[71] Lovell's crime was treason, for Henry VII dated the commencement of his reign before Bosworth. Looking past the numerous entries of "sanctuary men" found in calendar rolls and histories, there were several recorded instances of noble women who sought sanctuary prior to 1483. Like men, women were subject to execution for felonies, save in cases where pregnancies occurred. In those situations, female felons were customarily executed after the child's birth.[72] Intriguingly, there are four cases of elite women taking sanctuary in England during the 1470s. By examining these four episodes, the reasons which drove women to seek the special protection come to light.

The first circumstance involved Elizabeth Woodville. In 1470, the Earl of Warwick's rebellion succeeded in driving Edward IV from England to Flanders. The

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[70] Some historians attributed Elizabeth Woodville's action to "womanish fear." See More, History of Richard III, 28.

[71] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 224-5.

[72] See P.J.P. Goldberg, ed. "Law and Custom" in Women in England c.1275-1525 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 223-60. See also Cox, Sanctuary Seekers, 58. The Duchess of Gloucester, Eleanor Cobham fled to sanctuary at Westminster in 1441 to escape a charge of witchcraft. However, "her claim to sanctuary was refused, as those guilty of heresy, necromancy, or witchcraft were always excluded from this immunity." It appears that relatively few women sought sanctuary compared with men. In 1532, the Domestic State Papers in the Public Record Office lists fifty persons who had taken sanctuary in Westminster. Of that figure only one was a woman. See Cox, Sanctuary Seekers, 72-74.

speed and success of that victory surprised those in England and across the Channel. Edward IV made his escape from the port city of Lynn, braving a Channel crossing and barely eluding capture by Dutch merchant-pirates. Woodville, pregnant with their fourth child, remained in London. Opting for the protection of the Church rather than the mercy of Warwick or Henry VI, she left the protective walls of the Tower of London and took her children to sanctuary in Westminster on 1 October 1470.[73]

Several descriptions of Woodville's first visit to sanctuary were recorded by contemporaries. John Warkworth, probably the most contemporary of that time, wrote:

> Also Queen Elizabeth, King Edward's wife, which had well vitalized and fortified the Tower of London, when she heard that her sovereign and husband was fled, she went secretly out of the tower into sanctuary at Westminster, with all her children, and she herself was great with child, and was delivered there right of a son that was called Prince Edward of England; and there she abode still in great trouble, till King Edward came in again to her.[74]

Woodville was responsible for fortifying the Tower of London in preparation for the upcoming war with Warwick.[75] She was approximately eight months pregnant at this time. Warkworth also used the word "secretly" to describe how she left the Tower to reach Westminster safely and declares that she lived "in great trouble" until her husband returned. Polydore Vergil, writing in the early 1500s, described this time and provides a few more facts:

> Elizabeth his wife, great with child at the same time, fled into Westminster and there took sanctuary, where she brought forth a son whom she called Edward.

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[73] Cora Scofield, "Elizabeth Woodville in the Sanctuary at Westminster, 1470," English Historical Review 24 (January 1909), 90-91. The leading biographers of Edward IV are Charles Ross and Cora Scofield. See Ross', Edward IV and Scofield's, The Life and Reign of Edward the Fourth.

[74] John Warkworth (d.1500), A Chronicle of the First Thirteen Years of the Reign of Edward the Fourth (London: J. B. Nichols, 1839), 35. This chronicle was first published in 1839 and is commonly attributed to John Warkworth, master of Peterhouse.

[75] The Dictionary of National Biography (to 1900). Edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. Vol 6, s.v. "ELIZABETH, queen of Edward IV." (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937-8), 615.

> When the flying of king Edward was known abroad, the earl [of Warwick] made more haste, and without all resistance came to London, and set the city in peace, troubled as then with a commotion of the Kentishmen, who about the time of king Edward's departure had spoiled the suburbs; for which benefit he was more welcome to all men.[76]

Vergil also recorded that Warwick "delivered king Henry out of prison" and restored him as the king of England. Henry VI safeguarded sanctuary throughout England, fearing the men of Kent would despoil Westminster.

Philippe de Commines, who was the advisor of the Duke of Burgundy in 1470, is another example of someone who reported the scene in his memoirs.[77] Commines personally knew Edward IV and was well-informed of local gossip. He wrote: "A great number of good knights and squires, who were in King Edward's interest, fled to the sanctuaries in London, and did the king good service afterwards; and this did the queen his wife, who, in great want of all things that were necessary, was there brought to bed of a prince."[78] In this page, Commines argued that the privileges of sanctuary offered real protection, not just for women, but armed knights as well. However, the writer also suggested that the living conditions were not ideal and that a queen adapted to living royally stood "in great want of all things that were necessary." Finally, the Croyland Chronicle contributed the specific day of Prince Edward's birth in sanctuary. The chronicler wrote:

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[76] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 133. As he was commissioned by Henry VII, Vergil had access to all the relevant source material, including possibly Warkworth's account. His evidence concerning a Kentish uprising agrees with the minutes from the Common Council as quoted previously.

[77] The same archbishop of Vienne, Angelo Cato, who commissioned Dominic Mancini to write about his experiences in England also convinced Philippe de Commines to leave his memoirs. Written many years after the events, they still contain information available only to an eye-witness participant of the events.

[78] Philippe de Commines, The Memoirs of Philippe de Commynes, Vol I (London: Henry Boln, 1855), 194-95. Commines lived in Burgundy during this period of 1470 as an advisor to the Duke of Burgundy. He conferred personally with Edward IV during his sojourn there and undoubtedly kept himself well-informed of the events taking place in England's court.

> At this time, on the feast of All Saints [November 1], there occurred the birth of Edward, eldest son of King Edward, while the king himself was in exile; it took place in Westminster Abbey where Queen Elizabeth and her three daughters had taken refuge. Those faithful to King Edward drew some consolation and hope from the event while King Henry's supporters, much the more numerous at this state, thought the birth of the child to be of little importance.[79]

It is probable that the author meant that Warwick and Henry VI considered themselves so secure against Edward IV that not even the birth of a prince could rock their confidence.

There are two main reasons for Woodville's pursuit of sanctuary. First, she was pregnant and knew that giving birth to a son was dangerous. A son would have been the first male heir of Edward IV, but a potential rival to Henry VI. Second, Warwick had executed her father and brother during his previous rebellion in England. Personal bitterness between Warwick and Woodville had festered for a number of years. Evidence of the animosity between Warwick and Elizabeth before the rebellion is clear. Elizabeth's marriage to Edward IV ruined Warwick's marriage negotiations in France. Warwick had tried to persuade Elizabeth to marry one of his supporters--a proposal she refused.[80] No evidence of Warwick's goodwill towards her manifested itself until after he arrived in London and secured the promise that sanctuary would not be violated. Up to that point, the pregnant Queen considered her life vulnerable enough to seek refuge in a place she hoped not even Warwick would dare enter. It was during her sojourn in sanctuary that she heard the rumors of Edward IV's death at sea, and one cannot doubt that she prepared herself for an indeterminable stay. From the account of Edward IV's triumphant return known as the Arrival, there is evidence of her relief at his return:

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[79] Croyland Chronicle, 123. It is unclear what the author meant concerning the birth of the heir of the house of York was "of little importance"--such an heir would eventually become a rival claimant to the throne. Edward IV's triumphant return only six months later defuses the issue.

[80] See Scofield's article "The Capture of Lord Rivers and Sir Anthony Woodville, 19 January 1460," English Historical Review 37 (April 1922), 253-55.

> From Powles the King went to Westminster, there honored, made his devout prayers, and gave thankings to God, Saint Peter, and Saint Edward, and then went to the Queen, and comforted her; that had a long time abided and sojourned at Westminster, assuring her person only by the great franchise of that holy place, in right great trouble, sorrow, and heaviness, which she sustained with all manner patience that belonged to any creature, and as constantly as hath been seen at any time any of so high estate to endure; in the which season nonetheless she had brought into this world, to the King's greatest joy, a fair son, a prince, wherewith she presented him at his coming, to his hearts singular comfort and gladness, and to all them that him truly loved and would serve.[81]

Life in sanctuary cannot be compared to pleasures she was used to at Westminster Palace. The author of the Arrival recognized Woodville for her patience and suffering, and especially for providing a male heir to her husband. When the previous queen, Marguerite d'Anjou, left England for Anjou in 1462, she had a country and powerful father to return to for help and guidance. In 1470, the Woodville manor at Grafton could not have provided sufficient protection to the fugitive Queen just as it did not protect her father from execution by Warwick. It is not clear where Woodville and her daughters stayed within the Abbey, but it is likely they occupied one of the untenanted houses offered for rent by the monks of Westminster under the aegis of sanctuary.[82] All of the basic needs of life were available within. After Warwick's success, Marguerite d'Anjou prepared to embark for England with her firstborn, Edward Lancaster. Ironically, when her boat reached England, Marguerite found herself in need of sanctuary.

The next two cases of elite women needing sanctuary occurred approximately at the same time. Warwick and Marguerite had joined loyalties in France, and their union was cemented by the marriage of Edward Lancaster to Warwick's second daughter, Anne

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[81] John Bruce, ed., Historie of the Arrivall of Edward IV. in England and the Final Recovery of his Kingdoms from Henry VI. AD 1471 (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1988), 17. The Arrival is the official Yorkist version of Edward IV's triumph against Warwick and Henry VI. It may have over-dramatized the danger Elizabeth suffered, but there can be no doubt as to her joy at her husband's return.

[82] MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville, 95-96. MacGibbon's sources indicate that Woodville was treated more like a commoner than a queen, and that London butcher named John Gould donated "half a beef and two muttons a week for the sustentation of her household."

Nevill. Warwick returned to England with an army and drove Edward IV into exile. Receiving soldiers and ships from his brother-in-law in Burgundy, Edward IV returned from exile only six months after his flight. The king then successfully challenged Warwick at the Battle of Barnet and defeated him 14 April 1471. Stalled by foul weather in the Channel, Marguerite eventually reached England only to learn of Warwick's death. According to Vergil, when she heard of Edward's decisive victory at Barnet, she "swooned for fear."[83] Interestingly, Vergil suggests her fear was not just for herself but for her son. The historian declared: "Queen Marguerite perceiving it was in vain to provide for wars, and now almost despairing for her own safety and her son's, departed to the next abbey, of the Cistercian order, which is at a village called Beaulieu, and there took sanctuary."[84] However, once news arrived that she had landed, many of her Lancastrian supporters hurried to meet her at Beaulieu. They promised their lives to her cause:

> The doleful woman, seeing the noblemen who were her friends, was somewhat refreshed in mind, and, laying fear somewhat apart, to the intent they should not think she had done anything unadvisedly, she talked with them of many matters, and declared the cause why she could not be present in time, and what reason moved her to fly unto that sanctuary; beseeching them particularly, first before all other things, to provide for the safety of her son.[85]

Vergil insists that her supporters convinced her to continue the invasion, which shortly thereafter led to their defeat at Tewkesbury. Marguerite understandably worried for the safety of her eighteen-year-old son. She had cause to fear Edward IV, as Woodville had

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[83] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 147.

[84] Ibid., 148. According to Thornley, the following southern abbeys had the most secure privileges: Westminster, St. Martin-le-Grand, Glastonbury and Beaulieu, Colchester and Culham. See Seton-Watson, Tudor Studies, 184. However, Vergil is the only historian who recorded Marguerite's sojourn in Beaulieu. Hall copied almost verbatim from Vergil. See Hall's Chronicle, 298. The Arrival indicates that she went to Cerne Abbey.

[85] Ibid.

cause to fear Warwick. After the Battle of Wakefield in 1459, Marguerite had the leaders of the Yorkist movement, Edward IV's father, brother, and uncles, beheaded. Their heads were then afixed to the gate spikes of the city of York. The war between Edward and Marguerite had lasted for over a decade, and she could not be certain her life would be safe if she were caught. The option she chose was to fight for her husband's sovereignty instead.

After the Battle of Tewkesbury on 4 May 1471, Marguerite was arrested and brought before Edward IV. By that point, it was too late to reach a sanctuary that protected traitors, as the abbey at Tewkesbury could not:

> And, where there were fled into the said church many of his [Edward IV's] rebels, in great number [space intentional] or more, hoping there to have been relieved and saved from bodily harm, he gave them all his free pardon, albeit there neither was, neither had not at any time been granted, any franchise to that place for any offenders against their prince having recourse thither, but that it had been lawful to the King to have commanded them to have been drawn out of the church, and had done them to be executed as his traitors, if so had been his pleasure. [86]

Despite his sweeping pardon to the inmates of the abbey, Edward IV did have the notable survivors of the Lancastrian cause removed and executed. With her son and husband dead, along with the majority of the supporters of the Lancastrian cause, Edward IV had Marguerite imprisoned. Later, he ransomed her back to her father, the Duke of Anjou, in 1475 as part of the Treaty of Picquigny.[87]

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[86] Arrival, 22. This point was made by the author of the Arrival to justify Edward IV's execution of many Lancastrian leaders even after his promise of pardon to all within. Because the abbey at Tewkesbury did not have the privilege of protecting traitors, as Westminster did, Edward IV was within his rights to remove them forcibly for treason.

[87] Kendall, Richard III, 140. Kendall wrote that Edward IV demanded 50,000 crowns from Louis XI for her ransom. Not only did she lose her kingdom to Edward but she lost her inheritance of Anjou to Louis. When she died in August 1482, Louis wrote and claimed possession of all of her dogs.

The third example of an elite woman seeking sanctuary is Anne Beauchamp, countess of Warwick. In 1469, she left France on a ship to join her husband just prior to Queen Marguerite's departure. Consequently, Beauchamp received the news of her husband's death at Barnet before Marguerite's arrival. The account of her flight to Beaulieu in the Arrival contradicts Vergil's account as to which sanctuary each woman fled to:

> The Countess of Warwick had a ship of avantage, and, therefore, landed afore the other, at Portsmouth, and, from thence, she went to Southampton, intending to have gone towards the Queen, which was landed at Weymouth. But, being there, she had certain knowledge that the King had won the field upon her husband, at Barnet, and there slain him, wherefore she would no further go towards the Queen, but, secretly, got over Hampton-water into the new forest, where she took her to the franchise of an abbey called Beaulieu, which, as it is said, is ample, and as large as the franchises of Westminster, or of Saint Martins at London.[88]

A ship of "avantage" is a ship sent in advance of another.[89] Therefore, according to the Arrival, Beauchamp went ahead of Marguerite's fleet and landed at a different place. Hearing the news of her husband's death, she fled "secretly" to Beaulieu. The Arrival declares that Marguerite in fact went to a different abbey: "The Queen, Margaret, and her son went from there she landed to an abbey nearby, called Cerne, and all the lords, and the remnant of the fellowship with them."[90] If Vergil is mistaken and Marguerite went to Cerne Abbey, it is understandable why she did not stay long and took her army north towards Wales for safety. The Countess of Warwick was not immune from repercussions for her involvement in the Wars of the Roses.[91] She remained in safety at Beaulieu;

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[88] Arrival, 22.

[89] A.J. Greimas, Dictionnaire de l'ancien français, s.v. "avantagier."

[90] Arrival, 22-23.

[91] Henrietta Leyser discussed a thirteenth-century legal text attributed to Bracton that indicated the three ways a widow could lose her dower rights. The third way was if her husband committed treason. See Leyser, Medieval Women : A Social History Of Women In England, 450-1500 (Oxford, 1995), 169.

however, under the same financial conditions Woodville had been under at Westminster. Perhaps Beauchamp remained in sanctuary to prevent her interference in the lands of her estates which defaulted to George of Clarence.[92] However, after her lands had been stripped from her and divided among her daughters and their husbands, she eventually left Beaulieu.[93] Anne Beauchamp was, by this time, Gloucester's mother-in-law. The controversy over the distribution of Warwick's lands and his daughters' inheritances caused the next instance of a woman in sanctuary, Anne Beauchamp's daughter, Anne Nevill, daughter of Warwick the Kingmaker.

As the daughter of a defeated traitor and as the widow of a rival prince, one might have expected to learn that Anne Nevill had been shut in a nunnery for the rest of her life. Nevill had only been married to Edward Lancaster for a few months when he was killed at Tewkesbury in 1471. Little is written about the second daughter of Warwick, even though she eventually became the Queen of England in 1483.[94] However, she was still the daughter of the countess of Warwick, and thus partial-heir to the Despenser lands from her mother's family. The only mention of Anne Nevill's stay in sanctuary is in the Croyland Chronicle. It records at length a fraternal dispute between Richard of Gloucester and George of Clarence over Anne Nevill. Though the inherent theme of this

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[92] Kendall, Richard III (New York, 1955), 129.

[93] Ibid., 130. There is a brief passage in the Paston Letters describing how she was released into Gloucester's custody and escorted to Middleham by Sir James Tyrell. From The Paston Letters, vol. III edited by James Gairdner (London, 1910), 92-93. It appears that Richard of Gloucester and his wife Anne Nevill asked for the custody of the countess of Warwick to stay at the family castle in Middleham. The countess' rights as inheritor of the Despenser lands appears to have been allocated between George and Richard, each of whom married one of the Nevill daughters.

[94] See Agnes Strickland, Lives of the Queens of England, vol. I (New York: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1843), 645-56; and Anne Crawford's Letters of the Queens of England 1100-1547 (United Kingdom: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1994). A drawing of her as the countess of Warwick was made by John Rous and added to The Rous Roll (1484) (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1980). She is depicted as a queen with two crowns being offered from opposing clouds, representing her Lancastrian husband, Edward, and her Yorkist husband, Richard III.

conflict is about Anne Beauchamp's lands, a feeling of vindictiveness also prevails between Gloucester and Clarence:

> I should like to bring in here the quarrel which had arisen in this Michaelmas term between the king's two brothers and which proved difficult to settle. After King Henry's son (to whom the earl of Warwick's younger daughter, the lady Anne, was married) had fallen at the battle of Tewkesbury, as already stated, Richard, duke of Gloucester, sought to make the same Anne his wife; this desire did not suit the plans of his brother, the duke of Clarence (married previously to the earl's elder daughter) who therefore had the girl hidden away so that his brother would not know where she was, since he feared a division of the inheritance.[95]

The fight over Anne Nevill escalated and created extreme tension between all three brothers. From the sources, it appears that Clarence took Nevill into his custody, effectively cutting off Richard's access to her. The Croyland Chronicle continued:

> He [George] wanted it [the inheritance] to come to himself alone, by right of his wife, rather than to share it with someone else. The Duke of Gloucester, however, was so much the more astute, that having discovered the girl dressed as a kitchen-maid in London, he had her moved into sanctuary in St. Martin's.[96]

It is unclear what compelled Nevill into the charade of servitude. That a Princess of Lancaster, a Despenser daughter, and cousin to the King was reduced to the disguise of kitchen-maid to keep her from marrying Gloucester reveals the extremes to which ambition and power were used. St. Martin-le-Grand in London was one of the most privileged sanctuaries in England. It was a suitable refuge that protected her from the authority and reach of Clarence. There is insufficient evidence to conclude whether Clarence would have or did physically harm her. However, that Gloucester felt her

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[95] Croyland, 133. See also, Gairdner, Life of Richard III, 20. Also Kendall, Richard III, 126.
[96] Croyland, 133.

situation dire enough to deserve sanctuary reveals that she was not considered safe in London around Clarence or his retainers.

The battle between Gloucester and Clarence over Nevill and her inheritance outraged the author of the Croyland Chronicle. Their struggle eclipsed the rights of Anne Beauchamp, the true owner of the Despenser inheritance:

> This left little or nothing at the disposal of the Countess, the true lady and heiress of Warwick to whom, during her lifetime, the noble inheritance of Warwick and Despenser belonged. I pass on readily without further inquiry into this hopeless business leaving these willful men to exercise their own will and have thought it proper to continue the rest of the history as it comes to mind, speaking freely and without knowingly including any falsehood.[97]

Gloucester did marry Nevill in 1472, with Clarence's reluctant consent, and they provided a place for Beauchamp at Middleham. The duke of Gloucester's compassion for Warwick's family is telling.[98] Considering that Gloucester trusted his future bride to the sanctuary at St. Martin-le-Grand, it seems even less probable that he would have advocated violation of sanctuary twelve years later.

Sanctuary During the Usurpation

After analyzing the history of sanctuary in England and examining the aristocratic women in the fifteenth century who used it, it is clear that sanctuary provided protection for women. However, according to these examples, it is not clear why Woodville took refuge at Westminster in April 1483. Historians in general do not agree on a single motive, but there is a general feeling that she did so to safeguard her own life, and the

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[97] Ibid.

[98] Richard III spent his adolescence in Middleham with Warwick's family.

lives of her children and also to protect a significant portion of her husband's wealth from Richard of Gloucester.[99] Woodville's motives for taking sanctuary will be examined in the following chapter. The question at issue in this chapter has been whether or not it is credible that Gloucester actually intended to violate sanctuary in 1483 by removing his nephew or in 1484 by removing Woodville and her daughters. The fact remains that he did not. Modern historians like Ross and Pollard are convinced that it was Gloucester's intention to violate sanctuary.[100] However, that view is untenable considering the practice of sanctuary in the fifteenth century and Gloucester's dependence on ecclesiastic favor in order eventually to become king. Gloucester would not have risked excommunication by forcibly removing any of the Queen's children from the sanctuary at Westminster Abbey. Rather, he would have relied on persuasion to achieve his goals. It is possible that he threatened to violate sanctuary; this would account for the rumors in Mancini's and More's works. Yet the Croyland Chronicle, written in 1486 after Richard III's death, recorded that Gloucester acted within the bounds of normal practice and respected sanctuary privileges. Mancini's record was written in 1483 and is not a complete account. Despite the inaccuracies in Mancini's record, it does offer crucial information regarding the usurpation.

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[99] See Gairdner, Richard the Third, 52-53. MacGibbon suggested that she fled to sanctuary because Richard had soundly beaten her in the political arena by his arrest of her brother and son. See MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville, 144-5. Kendall accused Elizabeth and her son, the Marquess, of cowardice and panic in the face of Richard's support. See Kendall, Richard III, 213. Ross intimated that Elizabeth and the Marquess would have been killed if they did not seek sanctuary. See Ross, Richard III, 73. Weir used Mancini's letter to support her idea that Richard intended to kill Elizabeth because of her role in George of Clarence's execution: "Clearly she feared that her very life might be in danger." See Weir, Princes in the Tower, 82-83. Curiously, there is not a general sense of agreement among historians as to why Elizabeth fled to sanctuary in 1483.

[100] Ross, Richard III, 86-87. Pollard, Richard III, 93-94.

In the months before Gloucester's usurpation, rumors of his deception and possible coup were rife in London. Mancini, a reliable eye witness to these rumors, based his report to the archbishop of Vienne on the news he heard in the streets during the early months of 1483. Therefore it is not strange that he reported a wide variety of events, many of which were undoubtedly true while others were fiction. For instance, he recorded that sanctuary was a peculiarly English custom and it had never been violated. However, it was the periodic violations of sanctuary that compelled the king, the Church, and the courts to question, defend, and reestablish sanctuary privileges a century before. Mancini also recorded that the Princes in the Tower were likely killed before the Duke's usurpation, an idea contested even by modern scholars.[101] Another example of the false rumors promulgated in London was in a letter written by George Cely in June 1483 stating that the Bishop of Ely, John Morton, was dead.[102] Morton was arrested by Gloucester during the council meeting where Hastings was arrested and then executed. Morton was sent under Buckingham's ward to Wales, where he participated in Henry VII's takeover, and he died in 1500 as the Cardinal of Canterbury. More's account of Gloucester's and Buckingham's speech in favor of violating sanctuary was more

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[101] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 61: "Men say that in the same will [Edward IV] appointed as protector of his children and realm his brother, Richard duke of Gloucester, who shortly after destroyed Edward's children and, then claimed for himself the throne." The Latin verb used is *oppressare*, meaning to unjustly subjugate someone or something. Armstrong's translation is "to destroy" and reveals his own animosity towards Richard III. See also C.A.J. Armstrong's article "The Crimes of Richard III" The Times (London), 26 May 1934, 13-14.

[102] Alison Hanham, ed. The Cely Letters: 1472-1488 (London, 1975), 184-5. Hanham, in her notes at the end of the collection, indicated that the letter was probably written after Hasting's execution on 20 June 1483, yet before Richard's claim to the throne was announced on 22 June. See Hanham, Cely Letters, 285.

indicative of his own decade rather than that of the usurper's. The greatest blows that damaged sanctuary privileges in England occurred following the publicity of the Stafford trial in 1486, the Hunne affair of 1514-15, and Judge Fineux's verdict in John Savage's case in 1520.[103] Intriguingly, this also occurred during More's tenure as undersheriff in London. The issue of sanctuary was hotly debated between judges, kings, and the clergy, and More's distaste for it can be seen in the dialogue of the speeches he invented in the History of Richard III: "For if one go to sanctuary with another man's goods, why should not the king leaving his body at liberty, satisfy the part of his goods even within the sanctuary? For neither king nor Pope can give any place such a privilege, that it shall discharge a man of his debts being able to pay."[104]

It was politically undesirable for Richard of Gloucester to break sanctuary in 1483. Yet it did not prevent him of taking action. According to More, Mancini, and the Croyland account, Gloucester had the sanctuary surrounded with armed guards. The intent was to hinder any of Woodville's supporters from joining her and also to stop any of her children from escaping and leaving the country. Blockading Westminster's sanctuary was no mean undertaking, considering the size and scope of its neighborhood. More's account reveals that Woodville occupied the Abbott's own residence and that she brought a share of her dead husband's treasure with her.[105] She was financially secure in

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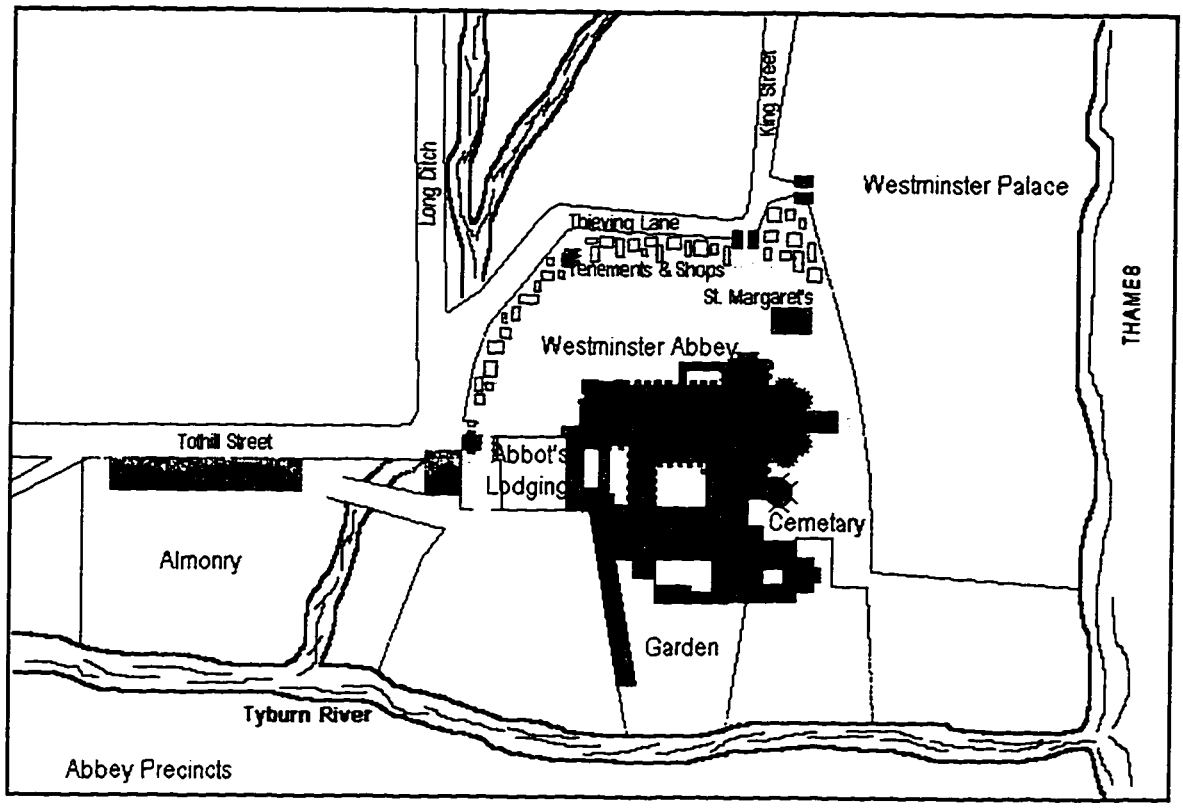
[103] Ives, Laws and Customs of England, 300. Fineux's verdict required that sanctuaries prove legitimate privileges and seriously damaged sanctuary practices throughout England. Westminster, however, did prove its privileges sufficiently to maintain its practice.

[104] More, History of Richard III, 32.

[105] Ibid., 20-22. More indicated that the news of Stony Stratford reached Elizabeth around midnight and that she hurriedly removed herself and her daughters to sanctuary, breaking down one of the

Illus. 1 Westminster Abbey (picture by Jeff Wheeler)



1483, unlike her previous sojourn thirteen years earlier. Gloucester's guards kept especially close watch on the area around the abbot's dwelling, though they watched the entire precinct:

> When this became known the sacred church of the monks of Westminster and the whole neighbourhood took on the appearance of a castle and a fortress and men of the greatest strictness were appointed as keepers there by King Richard. Over these men, as captain and chief, was a certain John Nesfield esquire; he watched all entrances and exits of the monastery so that no one inside could get out and no one from outside could get in without his permission.[106]

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abbey walls to bring her treasure directly through before Richard's men could seize it and the city. More also insisted that by the following morning, Thomas Rotherham witnessed that Richard's servants were in control of the Thames and were searching anyone who attempted to enter the sanctuary.

[106] Croyland, 163.

Because of its size and the traffic, it is not surprising that Woodville's son, the Marquess Dorset, managed to escape. Dorset was Woodville's firstborn by her previous husband, John Grey of Groby.[107] He fled sanctuary and joined Henry Tudor in France, participating in Buckingham's revolt:

> At this same time the duke [of Buckingham] learned from his spies that the Marquess had left the sanctuary, and, supposing that he was hiding in the adjacent neighbourhood, he surrounded with troops and dogs the already grown crops and the cultivated and woody places, and sought for him, after the manner of huntsmen, by a very close encirclement: but he was never found.[108]

Despite the threatening presence of the soldiers, they did not violate the sanctuary when Gloucester desired his nephew's removal. Rather, the Cardinal of Canterbury persuaded Woodville to release the boy. No reliable record exists of the negotiation, yet the author of the Croyland Chronicle insisted she allowed Prince Richard to leave willingly.[109] Considering the privileges of Westminster, what might have happened if she had not?

Aside from violating sanctuary, Gloucester had other options. With Woodville and her relatives forbidden to take part in the new Protectorship, Gloucester was able to rearrange many appointments of England in the name of Edward V and through his

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[107] The Dictionary of National Biography (to 1900), edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. Vol. 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937-8), 644-45.

[108] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 91. Thomas Grey, Marquess of Dorset, was one of Woodville's son by her first marriage. After escaping sanctuary, the Marquess joined with Henry Tudor in France to support his takeover attempt. Intriguingly, after the reconciliation between Richard III and Woodville, she instructed the Marquess to return to England and support her. When he fled Tudor's camp, Tudor sent officers which caught him and brought him back. He did not participate in Henry VII's conquest of England.

[109] Croyland, 159. The Latin reads: "Illa verbis *gratanter* annuens dimisit puerum qui per dominum cardinalem ad regem in dictam Turrim Londoniarum perductus est." Italics used for emphasis.

authority as Protector without their interference.[110] His lure to draw Prince Richard out of sanctuary was the upcoming coronation of his brother, not a threat of starvation. Any priory or church could grant some form of sanctuary for up to forty days, and if the seeker did not abjure the realm at the termination, then the local law enforcement could legally withhold food and prevent anyone from feeding the inmate until they came out voluntarily. This practice did not apply to the great franchise at Westminster, which offered permanent sanctuary. Gloucester knew this. A year later, in 1484, when Richard III tried to persuade Woodville and her daughters to leave sanctuary, it was suggested by her modern biographers, Strickland and MacGibbon, that they feared being starved out.[111] A contemporary, like Polydore Vergil, insisted that Woodville was persuaded to forget her hatred because of her mutability.[112] However, the situation of sanctuary in Westminster was such that it would have been impossible for Richard III to prevent food from reaching the sanctuary without depriving the entire abbey, along with its numerous residents and affiliates, as well. That would have been a greater scandal than if he had violated sanctuary by physically removing his quarry.

Westminster Abbey was independent of Richard III's law. In the end, he could do nothing but write a public oath on 1 March 1484 promising to protect his nieces as his

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[110] British Museum, British Library Harleian Manuscript 433. (Gloucester, 1979), 13. For example, Buckingham was awarded with many of the previously Woodville-held lands in Wales. Gloucester's appointments up until his usurpation were done in the name of Edward : "Know that of our special grace and of our certain and mere motion and with the assent and agreement of our dearest uncle Richard Duke of Gloucester protector and defender of our realm of England we give and by these presents grant...". See Harleian 433, 27.

[111] See footnote 10.

[112] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 210.

kinswomen and provide suitable marriage portions for those he had legally declared illegitimate:

> M^d^. that I Richard by the Grace of God King of England and of Fraunce, and Lord of Irland, in the presens of you my Lords spirituell and temporell, and you Mair and Aldermen of my Cite of London, promitte and swere *verbo regio* upon these holy Evangelies of God by me personelly touched, that if the doughters of dame Elizabeth Gray late calling her selff Quene of England, that is to wit Elizabeth, Cecill, Anne, Kateryn, and Briggitte, woll come unto me out of the Sanctwarie of Westminster and be guyded, ruled, and demeaned after me, than I shall see that they shalbe in suertie of their lyffs, and also not suffre any manner hurt by any maner persone or persones to them or any of theim or their bodies and persones, to be done by way of ravissement or defouling contrarie their willes, nor them or any of theim emprisone within the Toure of London or other prisonne; but that I shall put theim in honest places of good name and fame, and theim honestly and curtesly shall see to be founden and entreated, and to have all things requisite and necessary for their exibicion and findings as my kynneswomen;[113]

With any other hope of freedom diminished by the failure of Buckingham's revolt, Woodville consented to the offer and released her daughters into Richard III's custody, just as she had with her son--willingly, but under considerable pressure.[114] Obviously she had more cause to require a written avowal of his oath than she had in 1483. Regardless

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[113] Henry Ellis, Original Letters, Illustrative of English History. Second Series. Vol. 1. (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 149-50. The rest of the statement includes a promise to provide suitable marriages for Woodville's daughters, instructions to their husbands to treat them well, and also a pension of 700 marks to be paid to her by John Nesfied, the squire Richard III had stationed to guard the sanctuary. He also promised "that if any surmyse or evyll report be made to me of them, or any of them, by any persone or persones, that than I shall not geve therunto faith ne credence, nor therfore put them to any maner ponysshement, before that they or any of them so accused may be at their lawfull defence and answer." Spelling is as contained in the original.

[114] Croyland, 171. The chronicler wrote that "after Queen Elizabeth, urged by frequent intercessions and dire threats, had sent all her daughters out of the sanctuary of Westminster to King Richard," he made all the lords spiritual and temporal swear to defend the rights of his son, Edward of Middleham, as the next king. Elizabeth's daughters in sanctuary posed a threat to Richard III's sovereignty, especially when Henry Tudor vowed to marry the oldest, Elizabeth, and make her his queen. Richard III was undoubtedly anxious that she and her sisters reside in his custody to hinder any attempt at removing them from the country to be used as pawns of rebellion.

of whether she trusted Richard III, Woodville found it to be in her best interest to obey him.

Other evidence exists supporting the view that Richard III kept the privileges of sanctuary secure. Aside from Woodville and her children, there were others in sanctuary who threatened his power. After Henry Tudor's failed first attempt at conquest in October 1483 during Buckingham's revolt, the supporters who could not flee the realm chose sanctuary just as Edward IV's supporters had in 1470:

> But when his confederates, who had now begun war, knew that the duke was forsaken of his people, and fled no man wist whither, they were suddenly dismayed, every man fled without hope of safety, and others got into sanctuaries or wilderness, or assayed to sail over the seas, whereof a great part came safe soon after into Brittany.[115]

These soldiers learned of Henry Tudor's landing and joined in the fight against Richard III. Edward IV had disposed of the Lancastrian leadership at Tewkesbury, because the abbey did not have the privileges that Westminster and St. Martin-le-Grand held. However, Richard III, by not violating the legitimate franchises, let his enemies find shelter nearby where his authority could not affect them. Not surprisingly, the royal tolerance for sanctuary diminished only a year later, in 1486, at the end of the first rebellion against Henry VII. It declined dramatically throughout the sixteenth century, ending eventually with the dissolution of Westminster Abbey's sanctuary privileges in

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[115] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 200. Also Hall's Chronicle, 394. According to Thornley, "Sanctuary in Medieval London," these "sanctuary men" from Tudor's army contributed to the overthrow of Richard III in 1485. It also made Henry VII realize how damaging sanctuary privileges could be to a kingship. See Thornley, "Sanctuary in Medieval London," 315.

1623, one hundred and forty years after Woodville fled there on the eve after the arrests at Stony Stratford.

The dilemma which has perplexed historians centers around the motives for the peace forged between Richard III and Woodville in 1484. Scholars are hard-pressed to understand why Woodville, who detested Richard III for his usurpation and the presumed murder of her sons, would have ever agreed to support the man who had taken so much from her. Historians like Ross and Pollard do not find it inconsistent to think that if Gloucester would kill his nephews, he was certainly cruel enough to violate sanctuary.[116] However, the fact remains that Gloucester, neither before nor after the usurpation, violated sanctuary. He used negotiation to persuade Woodville in both instances. The difference then between Richard III and the Tudor monarchs who succeeded him is that Richard III upheld the privilege of sanctuary and Henry VII and Henry VIII did not. For example, Humphrey Stafford fled to the sanctuary of St. Johns in Colchester with Lord Lovell following Richard III's defeat at Bosworth. Stafford left sanctuary to raise a rebellion against Henry VII in 1486. When it failed, he took sanctuary at Culham Abbey near Oxford but was subsequently extradited for treason. Because Culham Abbey did not have the same privileges as Westminster, the courts decided that unless the sovereign gave it such privileges, none could be enjoyed. Stafford was executed.[117] Westminster's privileges were not assaulted directly at first. Other abbeys were forced by law to prove

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[116] Ross, Richard III, 86-87. Also Pollard, Princes in the Tower, 93.

[117] Ives, Laws and Customs of England, 297.

their privileges and these were quickly stripped away as the proof became more difficult to justify legally.

The argument that Gloucester intended to violate Westminster does not agree with the evidence of how strongly that sanctuary was upheld in the latter half of the fifteenth century. This chapter has argued that Woodville was truly safe within the sanctuary at Westminster and that Gloucester would not have risked a confrontation with the Church to remove her or her children. Moreover, the question still remains why the Queen felt compelled to enter sanctuary in 1483 and why she refused to leave even after releasing her son and her daughters. If she had received the protection of the Abbot of Westminster solely out of her desire for her children's safety, she would have had no motive to remain there unless she felt her life was also personally threatened by Gloucester. In the next chapter, the sources will reveal that the most probable motive for Woodville's actions involve a conspiracy, and her involvement in it, to murder Gloucester. It is the crucial motive that links the Queen's behavior in sanctuary to the Duke's actions in Stony Stratford, including possibly his eventual usurpation of the throne. To believe that Richard of Gloucester's cunning, ambition, and depravity were the sole causes of the death of the Princes in the Tower fails to consider the very real power Elizabeth Woodville held, and used, upon the death of her husband.

CHAPTER THREE

The Sanctuary Conclusion: The Usurpation of Richard III

According to the practice of sanctuary privileges, aristocratic women in fifteenth-century England rarely sought that degree of asylum unless they considered themselves threatened. The inhabitants of a sanctuary usually consisted of criminals, debtors, and the monks who harbored them. It was its own separate society, immune to the king's law. In April 1483, Elizabeth Woodville sought sanctuary with her children to escape the Duke of Gloucester. Unfortunately, Woodville's actions were interpreted as a response to a coup Gloucester made in Stony Stratford. However, compelling evidence in the primary sources reveals her complicity in a plot against Gloucester's life. Despite the negative reputation the Duke of Gloucester has earned over the centuries, the evidence must be reexamined in the context of its own time. The actions of Gloucester and Woodville in 1483 reflect the tumultuous times they lived in. Their reactions to Edward IV's death created the history of the usurpation. The arrests Gloucester made at Stony Stratford were as unjustified and ambiguous as was Woodville's flight to sanctuary without appreciating the viability of the "Sanctuary Conclusion."

Before examining the contemporary accounts of the events of April 1483, it will be beneficial to review several modern interpretations of Gloucester's usurpation. History has described him as a man living in violent times who wrested the throne from

his younger nephews and then secretly executed them.[1] Historians are not in agreement as to when Gloucester decided to usurp control over the kingdom, but the general opinion is that his intentions took root when he made the arrests at Stony Stratford on 30 April 1483. The arrests are described as a political coup, cutting off the Woodville family's control of the kingdom by seizing Prince Edward. Accordingly, Gloucester's purported dissimulation over the next two months allowed him to remove his chief opposition; he executed Lord Hastings and arrested Thomas Rotherham and John Morton. By feigning a coronation date for Prince Edward, the Protector was able to defraud the Dowager Queen of Prince Richard's custody and thus remove the last barrier to his claim on the throne. Gloucester denounced Woodville's marriage to Edward IV as invalid because of a previous marriage contract on Edward's part, announcing that his nephews and nieces were illegitimate. At the people's behest, Gloucester and his wife Anne took the throne, naming their son Edward as the new Prince of Wales. Gloucester's usurpation was cunning, shrewd, and eventually brutal, for history has generally charged him with the murder of his nephews following his coronation.

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[1] There are a variety of opinions about Richard III's usurpation. See Charles Ross, Richard III (California: U.C. Berkeley, 1981). Ross' view is neither Ricardian or anti-Ricardian, but a fair appraisal of the circumstances in fifteenth-century England, choosing the conclusion that Richard did eliminate his nephews. See also A.J. Pollard, Princes in the Tower (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) and Alison Weir, The Princes in the Tower (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992) for recent surveys of the controversy. James Gairdner's History of the Life and Reign of Richard the Third (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898) was considered the most scholarly work from the nineteenth century, yet is gives too much credence to Thomas More's work, a view seriously challenged this century. P.M. Kendall's biography, Richard III (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1955), is certainly pro-Ricardian and has contributed to the debate by challenging the myths and conclusions of Richard III's previous biographers.

This model does not answer all of the questions surrounding the incidents of 30 April 1483. The primary accounts in Dominic Mancini's Usurpation of Richard III and the Croyland Chronicle reveal that Gloucester ate a polite meal with his in-laws, Anthony Woodville and Richard Grey, in Northampton the evening before he arrested them.[2] Though a bold political move, it caused astonishment and suspicion back in London. Though bold, it was also bloodless. Rivers and Grey were arrested and sent to Gloucester's castle at Pontefract, but there is no record of harm or injury to anyone until later. Considering the violence of the War of the Roses at each political overturn, this is surprising. Edward IV's father was killed after the Battle of Wakefield and his head mounted on the gate of York. Henry VI was put to death in the Tower of London after Edward IV's victory at Tewkesbury. Even Edward IV's own brother, George of Clarence, met a mysterious death in the Tower due to the king's anger. Yet after Gloucester's arrests, Grey and Rivers were sent to the north. This incident at Stony Stratford so disconcerted the queen that she sought the shelter of Westminster. The significance of this has not escaped biographers of Richard III or Elizabeth Woodville, yet they have not examined the peculiarity of the event. Instead, numerous reasons are offered to explain Gloucester's action and Woodville's reaction. These center around

[2] Dominic Mancini, The Usurpation of Richard the Third (1483), translated by C.A.J. Armstrong (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 75. And Nicholas Pronay and John Cox, ed. The Crowland Chronicle Continuations 1459-1486 (London: Alan Sutton, 1986), 155.

why Woodville had cause to fear Gloucester.[3] Though fear was certainly a motivating factor to induce one to seek sanctuary, the sources suggest that the Queen was involved in a conspiracy to murder her brother-in-law. If true, it gives Woodville sufficient reason to believe her life was in immediate danger, it gives Gloucester a compelling motive to consider a usurpation, and it provides a link that answers the dilemma as to why the Queen released her children from Westminster but hesitated to remove herself.

The primary sources themselves offer a variety of suggestions as to the reasons for Gloucester's usurpation. Contemporary historians such as Polydore Vergil and Thomas More insisted on ambition as the motive.[4] Dominic Mancini expanded it further by declaring that "Richard was actuated not only by ambition and lust for power, for he also proclaimed that he was harassed by the ignoble family of the queen and the affronts of Edward's relatives by marriage."[5] The author of the Croyland Chronicle chose to withhold judgment and did not interpret Gloucester's motives. Overall, modern interpretations have used the primary sources to found their conclusions as to what induced Gloucester to seize the throne.

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[3] Historians are generally in agreement that fear was the main motive behind Elizabeth's flight to sanctuary. Though "fear" certainly was the motive for such a drastic action as taking sanctuary, I am not convinced by the all arguments drawn from the sources. Rather than referencing all of the biographies on Richard III, I have selected to use those by Charles Ross, A.J. Pollard, and Alison Weir. These three interpretations take into consideration all of the relevant primary sources involved in the arrests at Stony Stratford--namely, More's Mancini's, and the Croyland account.

[4] In the introduction to his book on Richard III, Vergil wrote that when Richard learned of Edward IV's death, "he began to be kindled with an ardent desire of sovereignty" and dissembled until he could securely do so without opposition. See Polydore Vergil, Anglica Historia Books 23-25 (London: J. B. Nichols, 1846), 173. More introduced Richard as an evil, twisted hunchback who "had of old foreminded this conclusion" of exterminating his nephews. See Thomas More, The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, edited by Richard S. Sylvester, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 7-9.

[5] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 61.

Modern historians like Charles Ross, Alison Weir, and A.J. Pollard promoted the evidence found in Mancini's The Usurpation of Richard the Third in their respective works. According to Mancini, the rumors in London predicted that the Woodvilles feared violent retribution from Gloucester if he came to power.[6] Rather than entrusting Gloucester with the responsibility for the government, the Woodvilles wanted a council to rule the realm with Gloucester as chief in the council:

> All who favoured the queen's family voted for this proposal, as they were afraid that, if Richard took unto himself the crown or even governed alone, they, who bore the blame of Clarence's death, would suffer death or at least be ejected from their high estate.[7]

Mancini then connected the execution of the Duke of Clarence in 1478 with Gloucester's desire for revenge if the opportunity presented itself.[8] Thus Mancini reported that Gloucester's ideas of usurpation developed as early as 1478. Ross and Weir were convinced that the familial hostility between the Duke and the Woodvilles caused their mutual distrust, and that Gloucester's arrest of Rivers and Grey in Stony Stratford consummated Woodville's belief that vengeance was already being meted

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[6] Though Mancini was present in London during the events of interest in 1483, his account was more a collection of rumors than a first-hand witness of someone at court. For more on Mancini's perspective, see A.J. Pollard, "Dominic Mancini's Narrative of the Events of 1483," Nottingham Medieval Studies 38 (1994): 152-63.

[7] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III 71. There is reason to believe that Richard begrudged the Woodville's for the death of George, yet his anger would also have to be directed against Edward IV as well, who ordered the execution. Mancini also recorded a rumor about Richard's reaction to George's death: "At that time Richard Duke of Gloucester was so overcome with grief for his brother, that he could not dissimulate so well, but that he was overheard to say that he would one day avenge his brother's death." Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 63. Though these rumors appear convincing, there is little support from the sources to indicate that Richard and George were so close.

[8] Ibid., 63: "At that time Richard Duke of Gloucester was so overcome with grief for his brother, that he could not dissimulate so well, but that he was overheard to say that he would one day avenge his brother's death." This contradicts More's account, which read that Gloucester was inwardly pleased by his brother's death.

out.[9] These historians, including Pollard, concluded that Gloucester's move at Stony Stratford was preemptive, unprovoked, and politically shrewd. They also condemned Gloucester for his brutality against his nephews. However, the sources themselves have left evidence that the usurpation was caused by a reaction on Gloucester's part, rather than a premeditated design.

Aside from the Mancini account, there is no evidence to suggest that Gloucester and the Queen's family were enemies. On the contrary, many accounts reveal that after Edward IV's death, Gloucester sent comforting letters to the Queen and promised to be faithful to her sons and daughters. Vergil wrote in his Anglica Historia that Gloucester "sent most loving letters to Elizabeth the queen, comforting her with many words, and promising on his behalf (as the proverb is) seas and mountains" to trick their enemies into trusting him.[10] Mancini recorded that soon after Edward IV's death, the Protector wrote to the Council at London the following: "He had been loyal to his brother Edward, at home and abroad, in peace and war, and would be, if only permitted, equally loyal to his brother's son, and to all his brother's issue, even female, if perchance, which God forbid, the youth should die."[11] No record of confrontation exists between the

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[9] Ross insisted that Richard realized the dangers the Woodville family posed to him, especially after an early coronation of Edward V which would have robbed him of the role as Protector. Ross wrote that "no one knew better than he that the precedent for the judicial murder of a royal Duke was no more than five years old." See Ross, Richard III, 71. Weir supported the viability that Elizabeth feared Richard "and what he might do to her and hers in revenge for her role in the fall of Clarence." See Weir, Princes in the Tower, 82-83. Pollard offered no explanation for Elizabeth's hasty flight into Westminster, though he did attribute most of his sources for the usurpation to Mancini and the Croyland account.

[10] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 173.

[11] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 73.

Queen and the Duke of Gloucester, as existed between Gloucester and his brother, Clarence.[12] Apparently, the positive communication sent to the Queen increased Gloucester's credibility at court, which in turn made the arrests at Stony Stratford even more shocking. However, by examining the sources which account for these arrests, it is clear that Gloucester announced his motives for arresting Rivers and Grey at Stony Stratford and appeared consistent in maintaining that the Woodvilles, led by the Queen, attempted to assassinate him during his journey to London from York. Moreover, Woodville had the motive and means to carry through such perilous goal, especially at Stony Stratford. Finally, with the removal of Gloucester, Woodville would have held an uncontested position as Queen Mother, preserving her family's station as the head of the government--a position that would have assuredly been reduced or destroyed had Gloucester become the Protector.

Conspiracy at Stony Stratford

Despite the variation of events recorded by the primary accounts of the arrests at Stony Stratford, a common pattern emerges. Conspiracies and treachery were not an uncommon part of medieval life, especially in the fifteenth century. The Earl of Warwick and George of Clarence rose in secret rebellion against Edward IV in Lincolnshire in 1470. Their involvement was unknown until one of their fellow

[12] Strangely, Richard was not present at Elizabeth's coronation, yet it is not proper to presume the reasons behind the event. Illness may have easily prevented Richard's attendance. See George Smith, The Coronation of Elizabeth Woodville (1465). (Gloucester: Lancresse Printers, 1975).

conspirators, Robert Welles, was captured and revealed their complicity.[13] The memoirs of the French diplomat Philippe de Commines are imbedded with tales of conspiracy and murder, which he often personally witnessed. Even Elizabeth Woodville was recognized to be involved in a treasonous plot against Richard III while she was in sanctuary, a plot advanced by Margaret Beaufort, Henry Tudor's mother.[14] Rebellion carried a severe penalty, as the Duke of Buckingham learned after his plot against Richard III in October 1483.

Striking similarities between the primary accounts exhibit sufficient evidence to believe the charge that--whether honest or counterfeited--the Woodvilles instigated a conspiracy against Gloucester.[15] Mancini's account of the usurpation was written in December 1483, before Gloucester's death, making it the most contemporary account of the arrests at Stony Stratford. Though Mancini was not present, the rumors he heard in London generally agree with the other sources, the Croyland Chronicle and More's

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[13] John Gough Nichols, Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire, 1470 (London: Camden Society, 1847), 21-23. In a confession from Sir Robert Welles, he admitted that "att such tyme as the matir shuld come nerre the point of batelle they shuld calle upon my lord of Clarence to be king, and to distroye the kinge that so was aboute to distroye them and alle the realme." Spelling not modernized. Being called to appear before Edward IV and answer such this treasonous charge, Warwick and Clarence fled to France and received military support from Louis XI.

[14] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 195: "And she [Margaret Beaufort], being a wise woman, after the slaughter of king Edward's children was known, began to hope well of her son's fortune, supposing that the deed would without doubt prove for the profit of the commonwealth, if it might chance the blood of king Henry the Sixth and of king Edward to be intermingled by affinity, and so two most pernicious factions should be at once, by conjoining of both the houses, utterly taken away." Elizabeth Woodville's complicity in this plot was recognized, yet because of her privileges in sanctuary, Richard could not punish her for it.

[15] Pollard condemned the "conspiracy" as a smear campaign against the Woodvilles, and that Richard III "invented the conspiracy to justify the step he was about to take." See Pollard, Princes in the Tower, 99.

History of Richard III.[16] The King's council met in London without Gloucester's involvement and decided to fix an early coronation date for Prince Edward. Some in the council wanted Gloucester involved in the decision: "whom this business greatly concerned, so that he might be present both at the making and execution of such important decisions. Because, should they act otherwise, the Duke could only accede reluctantly, and perhaps might upset everything."[17] In response to this objection, Woodville's son, the Marquess, "is said to have replied, 'We are so important, that even without the king's uncle we can make and enforce these decisions.'"[18] The Woodvilles were reluctantly persuaded by Lord Hastings to limit their escort of Prince Edward to two thousand, while Hastings also encouraged Gloucester to meet them with an escort of his own before reaching London.

The young Prince Edward and his escort reached Stony Stratford on 29 April 1483, and Rivers and Grey were dispatched to greet the Duke of Gloucester at Northampton, ten miles to the north. They shared a common meal in apparent good-will: "Rivers on coming to Gloucester was graciously received in a very strong place belonging to the Duke, and after passing a great part of the night in conviviality, they

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[16] See A.J. Pollard, "Dominic Mancini's Narrative of the Events of 1483," Nottingham Medieval Studies 38 (October 1994): 152-63. I am grateful to Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs for the reference to this article. In the article, Pollard recounts five of Mancini's possible sources, only one of them by name--Edward V's physician, Dr. John Argentine. Pollard believes that Argentine was Mancini's source at the arrests of Stony Stratford. He also argues that Mancini was aware of Richard III's "smear campaign" preceding his usurpation(p. 159). See also Michael Hicks, Richard III: the Man Behind the Myth (London, 1991).

[17] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 73.

[18] Ibid., 73-75. This is the only account of the Marquess' blatant defiance of Richard's input on the king's council. If it is accurate, it reveals the Woodvilles' contempt for Richard's popularity and

both retired to bed."[19] Yet despite the amiable dinner, the next morning, the arrests occurred:

> At dawn on the following day, when everything was prepared for the journey, Richard, after secretly giving curt orders to this effect, seized Rivers and his companions and imprisoned them in that place. Then with a large body of soldiers, and in company with the Duke of Buckingham, he hastened at full gallop towards the young king. At the same time, by having the roads watched, the two Dukes guarded against any one informing the young king of these happenings before their arrival.[20]

Mancini did not reveal what happened in the short hours that night to cause such a drastic change in behavior. Vergil insisted that Gloucester and Buckingham began plotting the usurpation that night while the others slept: "Richard also hastened thither, whom Henry Duke of Buckingham met at Northampton, with whom the Duke of Gloucester had long conference, in so much that as is commonly believed he even then discovered to Henry his intent of usurping the kingdom."[21] Having reached Stony Stratford, Gloucester and Buckingham secured the young king. Mancini claimed that the two Dukes met the king, saluted him as their sovereign before denouncing his Woodville kin as being responsible for the decline of Edward IV's health. They also desired to keep Prince Edward in their custody for his own good and to arrest his advisors:

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power in England. Pollard believed the source may have been an Italian chancery clerk, Pietro Carmeliano. Pollard, "Mancini's Narrative," 155.

[19] Ibid., 75. This goodwill during the meal apparently put Rivers and Grey at ease, or perhaps intended to put Richard at ease. Something occurred that evening, changing the amiability into hostility.

[20] Ibid., 75-77.

[21] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 174

> Wherefore, lest they should play the same old game with the son, the Dukes said that these ministers should be removed from the king's side; because such a child would be incapable of governing so great a realm by means of puny men. Besides Gloucester himself accused them of conspiring his death and of preparing ambushes both in the capital and on the road, which had been revealed to him by their accomplices.[22]

Mancini recorded the first allegation made by Gloucester that someone intended to kill him. If Gloucester (or Mancini) was not lying, it appears that during the night he was warned of an ambush awaiting him on the road to London. This also granted Gloucester a reasonable motive to gather his soldiers and arrest those involved in the conspiracy. If not, then Gloucester must have invented the charge. The young king defied Gloucester's accusations and declared that his ministers had been selected by his father, whom he trusted, and did not wish to dismiss them until they proved to be evil.[23] Concerning the government of the realm, the young king showed that he trusted his mother and her family to guide him:

> As for the government of the kingdom, [Prince Edward] had complete confidence in the peers of the realm and the queen, so that this care but little concerned his former ministers. On hearing the queen's name the Duke of Buckingham, who loathed her race, then answered, it was not the business of women but of men to govern kingdoms, and so if he cherished any confidence in her he had better relinquish it.[24]

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[22] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 77: "Propterea dux ipse eos accusat, quod in suam mortem conspirassent, et insidias tam in urbe quam in via instruxiessent, que a consciis essent ei patefacte."

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 77-79. This purported comment by Buckingham emphasizes the point that Elizabeth was the power and influence behind the Woodville family and that a great amount of tension and bitterness existed between her and Buckingham, who was compelled during Edward IV's reign to marry Katherine Woodville.

Edward V was old and shrewd enough to realize that Gloucester and Buckingham were not asking his permission to dismiss his ministers and servants. They were telling him what would be done.

After the arrests at Stony Stratford, Mancini reported that Woodville tried to raise an army to liberate her son. Mancini is the only source that mentioned this: "The queen and the Marquess, who held the royal treasure, began collecting an army, to defend themselves, and to set free the young king from the clutches of the Dukes. But when they had exhorted certain nobles who had come to the city, and others, to take up arms, they perceived that men's minds were not only irresolute, but altogether hostile to themselves."[25] Failing to win popular and sufficient military support, Woodville divided her husband's treasury and fled into sanctuary.[26] To quell the panic that was arising in London, Gloucester sent a letter to the mayor and aldermen, telling them that he did not abduct the king but was protecting him and his own life from the machinations of the Queen's family. When the letter had been read, "all praised the Duke of Gloucester for his dutifulness towards his nephews and for his intention to punish their enemies."[27] Accordingly, Gloucester and the Duke of Buckingham entered London with the young king, but antagonized the Woodvilles with threats of treason and conspiracy. Mancini wrote:

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[25] Ibid., 79.

[26] Ibid. Pollard insisted that Edward IV's financial stability was not as considerable as Mancini led his readers to believe. It is cited as an example of Mancini's inaccuracies. See Pollard, "Mancini's Narrative," 158.

[27] Ibid., 83.

> As these two Dukes were seeking at every turn to arouse hatred against the queen's kin, and to estrange public opinion from her relatives, they took especial pains to do so on the day they entered the city. For ahead of the procession they sent four wagons loaded with weapons bearing the devices of the queen's brothers and sons, besides criers to make generally known throughout the crowded places by whatsoever way they passed, that these arms had been collected by the Duke's enemies and stored at convenient spots outside the capital, so as to attack and slay the Duke of Gloucester coming from the country.[28]

Mancini did not believe these charges and insisted that the weapons had been stored during the war with the Scots "for an altogether different purpose."[29] Mancini's record is crucial because he recorded details not found in any of the other contemporary records. Yet even though Mancini did not believe Gloucester's claim, the claim is not invalidated. Rather, it shows what rumors were prevailing in London and why many praised Gloucester's actions against the queen's family.

Gloucester did not drop these accusations after reaching London. His first act as Protector was to remove the chancellor, Thomas Rotherham, and replace him with John Russell. He then proceeded to prosecute the Queen's family legally, desiring to execute Rivers and Grey for their involvement:

> Accordingly [Richard] attempted to bring about the condemnation of those whom he had put into prison, by obtaining a decision of the council convicting them of preparing ambushes and of being guilty of treason itself. But this he was quite unable to achieve, because there appeared no certain case as regards the ambushes, and even had the crime been manifest, it would not have been treason, for at the time of the alleged ambushes he was neither regent nor did he hold any other public office.[30]

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[28] Ibid. More's account also corroborates the event that a supply of weapons was paraded through London.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Mancini, 85. There is no legal record of these charges, though Richard did instruct for them to be executed at Pontefract shortly thereafter.

Lack of evidence hampered Gloucester from proving the ambush charges, and legal wrangling prevented it from being considered treason by the council. If Mancini's account accurately described the arrests at Stony Stratford and Woodville's reaction by taking sanctuary, it adds credence to the idea that there was a conspiracy in April 1483. Moreover, Mancini's account is not the only record of the incidents.

The Croyland Chronicle's description of the arrests supports Mancini's record of a conspiracy. The chronicle discussed Edward IV's sudden death and declared that Gloucester responded by sending letters to the queen, promising "to come and offer submission, fealty and all that was due from him to his lord and king, Edward IV, the first-born son of his brother the dead king and the queen."[31] Then the Duke held a funeral service for his brother in the city of York and "bound, by oath, all the nobility of those parts in fealty to the king's son; he himself swore first of all."[32] The Chronicle also recorded that:

> All who were present keenly desired that this prince [Edward V] should succeed his father in all his glory. The more foresighted members of the Council, however, thought that the uncles and brothers on the mother's side should be absolutely forbidden to have control of the person of the young man until he came of age.[33]

In fact, Lord Hastings "protested that he would rather flee there [to Calais] than await the arrival of the new King if he did not come with a modest force. He was afraid that if

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[31] Croyland Chronicle, 155. Mancini's account ended in December 1483 while the Croyland account finished at the commencement of Henry VII's reign.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 153. This view again reveals that the Woodvilles were not seen favorably after Edward IV's death. See Michael Hick's excellent essay "The Changing Role of the Woodvilles in Yorkist Politics" in Richard III and his Rivals (London: The Hambledon Press, 1991), 209-28.

supreme power fell into the hands of the Queen's relatives they would then sharply avenge the alleged injuries done to them by that lord."[34] The political unrest that erupted immediately after Edward IV's death speaks of the instability in the realm and the lack of trust in the Woodvilles.

The author of the Croyland account used the same terms as Mancini to describe the peaceful meal between Gloucester and his in-laws the night before their arrest in Stony Stratford. After securing Rivers, Grey, and the Prince's chamberlain in the morning, Gloucester and Buckingham presented their charge to Prince Edward:

> The Duke of Gloucester, however, who was himself the leader of this conspiracy, did not put off or refuse to offer to his nephew, the king, any of the reverence required from a subject such as bared head, bent knee or any other posture. He said that he was only taking precautions to safeguard his own person because he knew for certain that there were men close to the king who had sworn to destroy his honour and his life. Having said that, he had it publicly proclaimed that anyone of the king's household should withdraw from the place at once and that they should not come near any places where the king might go, on pain of death. All this was done at Stony Stratford on Wednesday, the last day of April in the same year in which the old king died.[35]

Though the Croyland record did not describe Gloucester's attempt to have the arrested Woodville's executed for treason as Mancini did, the suggestion of a conspiracy "to destroy his honour and his life" appears to corroborate Mancini. The Queen's reaction to the news of the arrest, as related in the Croyland account, was the same.

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 157. Pronay and Cox translated the Croyland author's Latin genative "factionis" as "conspiracy." *Factio, factionis* more correctly represents "faction, company, association, class, order, sect, party." See Charlton T. Lewis, An Elementary Latin Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 312. Mancini used the verb *conspiro,-are* to describe a "conspiracy." I maintain that it was the Croyland chronicler's intention to describe Richard as the leader of a group against the Queen's family, rather than the leader of a conspiracy to accuse the Queen falsely.

By the following evening, word reached the Queen in London, who was able to take sanctuary before any of Gloucester's supporters could stop her: "The following night, when rumour of this had reached London, Queen Elizabeth transferred herself with all her children into the sanctuary of Westminster."[36] The chronicle offers no reason or explanation for this. Rather, it reveals that the next morning general confusion and mass chaos ensued: "You might have seen the partisans of one side and of the other, some sincerely, others dissimulating because of the confusing events, taking this side or that. Some collected their associates and stood by at Westminster in the name of the queen, others at London under the protection of Lord Hastings."[37] Obviously the arrests and Woodville's subsequent flight caused no small stir in London. The author of the Croyland Chronicle did not include an interpretation for the actions, adding to its credibility while diminishing its helpfulness by not explaining why the hysteria occurred.

Subsequent historians, like Thomas More and Polydore Vergil, freely interpreted the evidence, using it to bolster their attacks on Gloucester's cruelty and ruthlessness. Thomas More was five years old at the time of the arrests at Stony Stratford, and he grew up in England under the Tudors. Despite his animosity against Gloucester, More also recounted the events at Stony Stratford leading to the Duke's usurpation. He corroborated the previous two accounts in most details--including a charge of the

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[36] Croyland, 157: "Nocte sequenti perlatis his rumoribus usque Londonias Regina Elizabeth se transtulit infra sanctuarium Westmonasterii cum omnibus liberis suis." *Nocte sequenti*: the following night.

[37] Ibid.

Woodville's intent to destroy the noble blood of the realm. More offered details not corroborated by Mancini or the Croyland author, many being of his own invention. Regardless, they show how the facts of the event were interpreted twenty years after it happened. In More's account, Gloucester sent letters to the Queen, confirming his intention to respect the succession of her sons. More claimed that Gloucester "wrote unto the king [Edward V] so reverently, and to the queen's friends there so lovingly, that they nothing earthly mistrusting, brought the king up in great haste, not in good speed, with a sober company."[38] In More's account, the Duke caught up to them at Northampton, where Earl Rivers met them:

> Now was the king in his way to London gone from Northampton, when these Dukes of Gloucester and Buckingham came thither. Where remained behind the Lord Rivers, the king's uncle, intending on the morrow to follow the king and be with him at Stony Stratford, eleven miles thence, early ere he departed. So was there made that night much friendly cheer between these Dukes and the Lord Rivers a great while.[39]

The events, thus far revealed by More, parallel Mancini's and the accounts in Croyland. More vaguely described the events of the evening by writing that "the Dukes secretly with a few of their most privy friends set them down in council, wherein they spent a great part of the night."[40] Though More does not reveal what happened in that conference, he encouraged the reader to assume Gloucester and Buckingham planned the usurpation. At the coming of dawn, the Dukes prepared their escort before Earl River's men were in order. Gloucester's servants secured the inn where Rivers was

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[38] Sir Thomas More, The History of King Richard III (New Haven, 1963), 17. Printed in Volume II of the Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

staying and arrested Rivers and Grey in the morning. More's History of Richard III included a scene where Rivers discovered he was trapped in the inn and decided to face the Dukes before they left. When they saw him, "they began to quarrel with him and say that he intended to set distance between the king and them and to bring them to confusion, but it should not lie in his power."[41] Rivers tried to "excuse himself" of these charges, but they would not listen and hurried to Stony Stratford to meet Prince Edward.

In the village of Stony Stratford, Gloucester and Buckingham met the king with his escort and ordered everyone around the Prince to return to their rooms. Thus with the men they had brought from the north, the Protector and the Duke of Buckingham took charge of Prince Edward:

> And thus in a goodly array, they came to the king and on their knees in very humble wise saluted his grace, which received them in very joyous and amiable manner, nothing earthly knowing nor mistrusting as yet. But even, by and by, in his presence, they picked a quarrel to the Lord Richard Grey, the king's other brother by his mother, saying that he, with the lord marquis his brother and the Lord Rivers his uncle, had compassed to rule the king and the realm, and to set variance among the states, and to subdue and destroy the noble blood of the realm. Towards the accomplishing whereof, they said that the lord Marquess had entered into the Tower of London, and thence taken out the king's treasure, and sent men to the sea. All which thing these Dukes wist well were done for good purposes and necessary by the whole council at London, saving that somewhat they must say.[42]

The young Prince was startled by such an accusation and reportedly defended against these accusations. Though More does not specifically declare that there was an

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[41] Ibid., 17-18. In More's Latin version, he used the word *discordia* rather than "confusion." In essence, Gloucester and Buckingham accused Rivers of planting disagreement and discord between Prince Edward and themselves, rather than simply confusion.

[42] Ibid., 19.

assassination attempt against Gloucester and Buckingham, he did indicate that there was an intent "to subdue and destroy the noble blood of the realm." More defended the Marquess by stating that the ships had been deployed by permission of the council in London. Yet he neglected to mention that the council which had been selected at London, without Gloucester's participation, had made the Duke its head. It acted on the authority of the Woodvilles in London, without seeking the advice or order from the man Edward IV had wanted to rule as Protector. Though More did not explicitly state that the Woodvilles were involved in political machinations, there is the suspicion that something provoked the arrests of Rivers and Grey.

More's description of Woodville's flight into sanctuary upon hearing the news offers details not previously given. He emotionalized the scene by describing what Woodville felt, but reading past that emotion, the confusion of the events was very similar:

> But anon the tidings of this matter came hastily to the queen, a little before the midnight following, and that in the sorest wise, that the king her son was taken; her brother, her son, and her other friends arrested and sent no man wist whither, to be done with God wot what. With which tidings, the queen, in great flight and heaviness, bewailing her child's ruin, her friends' mischance, and her own infortune, damning the time that ever she dissuaded the gathering of power about the king, gat herself in all the haste possible with her younger son and her daughters out of the palace of Westminster, in which she then lay, into the sanctuary, lodging herself and her company there in the abbot's place.[43]

The account seems similar, yet More added an additional scene with the Archbishop of York, Thomas Rotherham. Rotherham supported Woodville by delivering the privy

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[43] Ibid., 20-21. More and Vergil both declared that through Elizabeth's prescience, she realized that the usurpation was inevitable. Intriguingly, this paints her as being wiser than Lord Hastings or

seal to her and sought to comfort her by telling her that Gloucester would not become the next king. The archbishop found the Queen Dowager in a state of chaos:

> About whom he found much heaviness, rumble, haste and business, carriage and conveyance of her stuff into sanctuary--chests, coffers, packs, fardelles, trusses, all on men's backs, no man unoccupied, some lading, some going, some discharging, some coming for more, some breaking down the walls to bring in the next way, and some yet drew to them that hold to carry a wrong way. The queen herself sat alone low on the rushes, all desolate and dismayed, whom the archbishop comforted in the best manner he could, showing her that he trusted the matter was nothing so sore as she took it for.[44]

Woodville certainly remembered the barren conditions she endured in Westminster during her husband's exile in Flanders. Because the privileges of sanctuary extended also to her property, she was secure financially as well as physically. Yet if More's description through Rotherham is correct, that the Queen sat desolately on the floor rushes, unkempt, disheveled, and weeping, one must wonder as to the cause of these emotions. The message had come that her brother and son were arrested and taken to the north, and her sudden panic and flight are indicative of one fearing for their safety.

Even though More himself does not claim that Woodville tried to eliminate Gloucester, there is enough parallel evidence to coincide with Mancini and the Croyland Chronicle to suggest the possibility. It explains Gloucester's sudden change of heart at Northampton and his decision to send Earl Rivers from a peaceable dinner to a cell at Pontefract. It also sheds light on Woodville's hasty flight to sanctuary with her son's considerable treasury. She knew she might be staying there for a while, for she lacked

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Thomas Rotherham, also shrewd political practitioners.

[44] Ibid., 21-22.

the power to hold London against Gloucester. Though she held the Tower and controlled the fleet, she chose the protection of sanctuary.

Like More, the Italian humanist Polydore Vergil did not begin his research for the Anglica Historia until nearly twenty years after the arrests at Stony Stratford, and it is interesting that the language and motives changed and many details were left out. Conversely, other details are invented. Vergil's account is a condensed version of the facts, intermixed with his own opinion about Gloucester's motives. Vergil set his premise that Gloucester was a cunning, cold-blooded killer:

> He was little of stature, deformed of body, the one shoulder being higher than the other, a short and sour countenance, which seemed to savor of mischief, and utter evidently craft and deceit. The while he was thinking of any matter, he did continually bite his nether lip, as though that cruel nature of his did so rage against itself in that little carcass. Also he was wont to be ever with his right hand pulling out of the sheath to the midst, and putting in again, the dagger which he did always wear. Truly he hard a sharp wit, provident and subtle, apt both to counterfeit and dissemble; his courage also halt and fierce, which failed him not in the very death, which, when his men forsook him, he rather yielded to take with the sword, than by foul flight to prolong his life, uncertain what death perchance soon after by sickness or other violence to suffer.[45]

The idea of taking over the throne of England had festered in his mind, Vergil insists, from the moment he learned of Edward IV's death. His record of this transformation from loyal brother to ruthless villain occurs in the beginning of his book about Richard III. Describing the night before the arrests, Vergil did not mention the meal Gloucester and Earl Rivers shared in Northampton. Rather, he delved into a secret conference

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[45] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 226-27.

between Gloucester and Buckingham that he invented.[46] Instead of discovering a plot to assassinate the Duke of Gloucester, Vergil uncovered a plot devised by Gloucester to take the throne. Vergil recorded that Gloucester met Buckingham at Northampton:

> With whom the Duke of Gloucester had long conference, in so much that as is commonly believed he even then discovered to Henry his intent of usurping the kingdom, and especially for because the Duke following afterwards his humor, whether it were for fear or for obedience, held ever with him.[47]

With this understanding, Vergil's account of the arrests at Stony Stratford began a chain of sinister events leading Gloucester to the throne. There are no links to the previous accounts, for the historian of the Anglica Historia insinuated his theory into the events at Stony Stratford. Therefore, the arrest of Rivers and Grey occurred because Gloucester and Buckingham knew they would not "assent to his intent and purpose."[48] Thus Vergil eliminated the conspiracy motive, making Gloucester's action one of cruel ambition. Intriguingly, it was Vergil who recorded that the Queen was involved in a plot to overthrow Gloucester after his usurpation.

Consequently to the arrests at Stony Stratford, the Queen's flight to sanctuary was perceived by Vergil as being totally justified under the situation. Vergil, as with More, lived in England during heightening tensions between the crown and sanctuary privileges. Likewise, because Woodville foresaw the impending doom of her son, she was prompted to protect her other son, Prince Richard, from harm:

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[46] Vergil's assertion that Gloucester and Buckingham spent the night in secret conference planning the usurpation is totally unsubstantiated by any of the other primary sources, nor does Vergil credit any source with the information.

[47] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 174. Actually, Buckingham held with Richard III only until October 1483.

[48] Ibid., 174-5.

> But when the fame of so outrageous and horrible fact came to London, all men were wonderously amazed, and in great fear, but especially Elizabeth the queen was much dismayed, and determined forthwith to fly; for, suspecting even then that there was no plain dealing, to the intent she might deliver her other children from the present danger, she conveyed herself with them and the Marquess into the sanctuary at Westminster. The very same did other noble men who were of her mind for the safeguard of her children.[49]

Contrary to Vergil's reasoning, it is not consistent to think that if Elizabeth Woodville knew "even then that there was no plain dealing" with Gloucester, she would have released her younger son into his care. Vergil's Anglica Historia presumed to judge Woodville with the wisdom of perceiving the usurpation before it happened and the foolishness for playing into his hands. Vergil's account of the events preceeding the usurpation conflict with the other sources and jeopardize the integrity of his work.[50]

The evidence provided by Mancini, the Croyland author, and More, has commonly been interpreted as a "smear campaign" instigated by Gloucester to discredit and remove the Woodville opponents of his usurpation.[51] To a man accused of murdering his own nephews, this adds to the Duke's black image. However, if Mancini's, More's, and Croyland's accounts are true, if Gloucester truly did charge the Woodvilles intended to murder him, then it must also be considered that perhaps it was

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[49] Ibid., 175.

[50] Modern interpreters of the usurpation, like Alison Weir, A.J. Pollard, and Charles Ross used the Anglica Historia, yet also recognized its limitations. Weir insisted that the Anglica Historia is reliable and that Vergil was not a "sycophant" of Henry VII, under whose patronage he wrote it. See Weir, Princes in the Tower, 8. Pollard discussed Vergil's training in classic history and how it influenced his work. For example, Vergil used the models of ancient historians to base his characters, such as his interpretation of Henry VII on the model of Vespasian. See Pollard, "Mancini's Narrative," 153. Ross contended that Vergil's sources were pro-Tudor and that he derived his accounts of Richard III's usurpation from men like Cardinal Morton, Bishop Fox of Winchester, Christopher Urswick--Henry VII's confessor--and Reginald Bray. See Ross, Richard III, xxviii-xxix.

[51] Pollard leads this debate both in Princes in the Tower, 103 and "Mancini's Narrative," 159. See also Hicks, Richard III: the Man Behind the Myth, 107-8.

more than just a nefarious plot by a wicked uncle. What if Richard of Gloucester was telling the truth? This is a difficult possibility to accept, considering the events as they unfolded do not necessarily inspire one to credit Gloucester with honesty. However, considering his reputation before the death of Edward IV, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the Woodville family intended an overthrow at Stony Stratford. Not only do the sources reveal the conspiracy, but Gloucester publicly announced the Queen's role in an attempt on his life in a letter he wrote to the mayor of the city of York, John Newton:

> The Duke of Gloucester, Brother and Uncle of [the]
> King, Protector, Defender, great Chamberlain
> Constable and Admiral of England
>
> Right trusty and well-beloved, we greet you well, and as ye love the well of us, and the well surety of your own self, we heartily pray you to come unto us to London in all the diligence ye can possible after the sight hereof, with as many as ye can make defensibly arrayed, there to aid and assist us against the Queen, her blood adherents and affinity, which have intended, and daily doth intend, to murder and utterly destroy us and our cousin the Duke of Buckingham, and the old royal blood of this realm, and as it is now openly known, by their subtle and damnable ways forecasted the same, and also the final destruction and disinheritance of you and all other the inheritors and men of honor, as well of the north parties as other countries, that belong to us; as our trusty servant, this bearer, shall more at large show you, to whom we pray you give credence, and as ever we may do for you in time coming fail not, but haste you to us hither. Given under our signet, at London, the 10th day of June.
>
> To our right trusty and wellbeloved John Newton, Mayor of York and his Brother, and the Community of the same, and every of them[52]

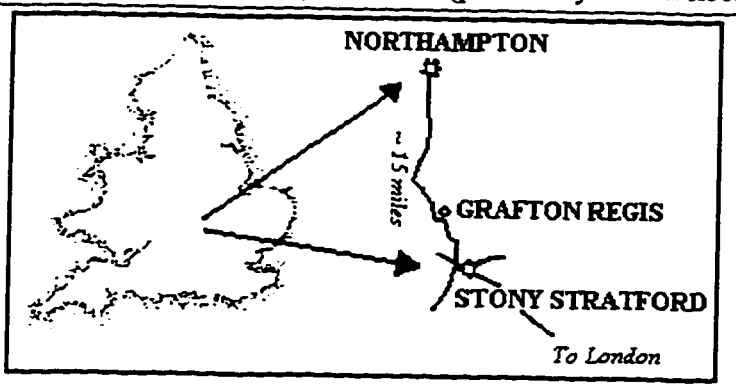
[52] Robert Davies, Extracts From the Municipal Records of the City of York (London, 1843): 149-50. David MacGibbon argued against Elizabeth being involved in any conspiracy against Richard III. Though he admitted there were rumors of attempts, he denied that any conspiracy originated from her. See MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville, 147-49.

In the final analysis, there are two credible avenues of belief. Either Gloucester invented the "conspiracy" or he did not. There is ample evidence to prove that he announced the existence of the conspiracy, but no amount of evidence can verify whether he believed it or not. It may have been a ruse. Yet the accusation of a conspiracy to murder exists in the records of Mancini, More, and the Croyland Chronicle. Interestingly, all three sources also record enough evidence to suggest that Woodville had a legitimate motive. The geography of Stony Stratford itself offers a clue, one strangely overlooked. Riding on horseback down from York, Gloucester stopped in the traditional home county of the Woodville family, Northampton.

Woodville Power in Northampton

To examine whether the Queen and her family had sufficient motive to murder Gloucester, the primary sources continue to offer insightful clues that support such a charge. As the evidence has revealed thus far, there were accounts of a plot against Gloucester, whether real or invented. Though circumstantial in nature, it should not be overlooked where this plot was discovered. Elizabeth Woodville descended from the local leadership in Northampton, and her family owned a manor at Grafton several miles from Stony Stratford. It was in the manor house of Grafton where Woodville held her secretly liaisons with Edward IV before their marriage in 1464. The Queen's father, Richard Woodville, and her brother John were captured and dragged from Grafton during Warwick's rebellion. They were taken to Northampton by Warwick and

Illus. 2 Northampton and Stony Stratford (picture by Jeff Wheeler)



Clarence and executed on 12 August 1469.[53] Indeed, the Woodvilles were notable in the Northampton region before their rise to power under Edward IV.[54] In other words, it is peculiar that Prince Edward's party stopped in Stony Stratford and that Rivers and Grey met Gloucester fifteen miles north in Northampton. They were all certainly within Woodville territory. Other accounts also suggest that the Woodville family's intentions after Edward IV's death were not innocuous.

The Woodville family was a major power in England, and even Lord Hastings had cause to fear them. Therefore, after Edward IV's death, Hastings warned Gloucester of the family's ambition and offered a solution to exact his revenge over

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[53] MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville, 79. MacGibbon placed the capture at Grafton rather than Chepstow. See his footnote 4. Also Edward Hall, Hall's Chronicle (1550), (New York: AMS Press, 1965; reprint, London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1809), 274. "The Northamptonshire men, with divers of the Northernmen by them procured, in this fury made them a captain, and called him Robin of Reddesdale, and suddenly came to the manor of Grafton, where the earl Rivers father to the Queen then lay whom they loved not, and there by force took the said earl and sir John his son, and brought them to Northampton, and there without judgement stroke off their heads, whose bodies were solemnly interred in the Blackfriars at Northampton."

[54] J.R. Lander, Crown and Nobility 1450-1509 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976), 109. The Woodvilles owned estates in Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Rutland and Kent. Lander also recounted that Richard Woodville's father had been seneschal of Normandy under Henry V. See also Michael Hicks, "The Changing Role of the Woodvilles in Yorkist Politics to 1483," in Richard III and his Rivals, 209-28.

their role in George of Clarence's death.[55] According to Mancini, Hastings suggested to the Protector that he abduct the young King en route to London, adding that "he [Hastings] was alone in the capital and not without great danger, for he could scarcely escape the snares of his enemies since their old hatred was aggravated by his friendship with the Duke of Gloucester."[56] Mancini also insisted that the Woodvilles greatly feared Gloucester and that they had voted against his receiving the Protectorship for fear of being killed or "ejected from their high estate."[57] Similarly, the Croyland account shows friction in London between the Queen's family and Hastings. Arguing over how large Prince Edward's escort should be, there were many who "thought that the uncles and brothers on the mother's side should be absolutely forbidden to have control of the person of the young man until he came of age."[58] Hastings was reportedly afraid that "if supreme power fell into the hands of the queen's relatives they would then sharply avenge the alleged injuries done to them by that lord."[59] Even after the arrests at Stony Stratford, there are accounts that the people chose between the factions of Hastings and that of the Queen:

> In the morning you might have seen the partisans of one side and of the other, some sincerely, others dissimulating because of the confusing events, taking this side or that. Some collected their associates and stood by at Westminster in

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[55] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 73. Unfortunately, the events concerning George's execution are shrouded with mystery, including the morbid method of execution. There is not enough evidence to link the Woodvilles to George's murder as there is not enough evidence to suggest that Richard hated the Queen for it. Only Mancini's account makes this connection. See Lander, "The Treason and Death of the Duke of Clarence: A Reinterpretation," Crown and Nobility, 242-66.

[56] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 73.

[57] Ibid., 71. See above, footnote 8.

[58] Croyland, 153.

[59] Ibid., 155. Echoes of this contention between Hastings and the Queen's family survived in Shakespeare's play.

> the name of the queen, others at London under the protection of Lord Hastings.[60]

The general feeling of suspicion and distrust is telling. The bickering between Hastings and the Queen had been mitigated while Edward IV was alive. Vergil records that after the arrests, Hastings gathered his supporters around him to discuss how they should react to Gloucester's move in Stony Stratford:

> But the lord Hastings who bare privy hatred to the marquis and others of the queen's side, who for that cause had exhorted Richard to take upon him the government of the prince, when he saw all in uproar and that matters fell out otherwise than he had weaned, repenting therefore that which he had done, called together unto Powles church such friends as he knew to be right careful for the life, dignity, and estate of prince Edward, and conferred with them what best was to be done.[61]

When Edward IV chose his brother to become Protector, he hoped to maintain that balance and the continuity of the realm. With Gloucester's experience in war and leadership, he was seen as fit to lead the country during a time of hostilities with Scotland and France. Hastings' threat to depart to Calais if Prince Edward came with too many soldiers reveals that he was not in a position, politically, to stand alone against the Woodvilles. His correspondence with Gloucester shows his desire to win Gloucester's favor and unite with him against the Woodvilles.

When Edward IV died, only two factions had the political strength to assume control of the realm--Gloucester and Woodville. The political maneuvering began immediately, as demonstrated in the examples during the Council of London before

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[60] Ibid., 157. It does not appear that Gloucester had a faction in London or Westminster. His power was greatly centered in the North.

[61] Vergil, Anglica Historia, 175.

Gloucester or Prince Edward had arrived. The Protector firmly and unmistakably exercised power and authority in northern England. He had demonstrated his military ability against the Scots and had been called upon to lead the war against France after their repudiation of the Treaty of Picquigny.[62] Woodville had spent nearly the entire duration of her husband's reign improving her family's station and wealth. She may not have superseded Hastings in controlling her husband's policy, but she was successful at increasing her family's position. By 1466, the Queen's sisters had secured notable husbands, including the Duke of Buckingham, the heirs of Kent, Essex, and Arundel. Her older son through her first marriage was married to Exeter's heiress and one of her brothers had married the Dowager-Duchess of Norfolk, older than his own grandmother.[63] Whether the elevation of the Woodvilles was as disagreeable to the rest of the realm as it was to Warwick is debatable. Regardless, it significantly improved their wealth, power, and position. As Prince Edward grew older and started exercising his position as Prince of Wales, the power of the Woodvilles grew in more subtle ways.

Though it may not have been Edward IV's intent to expand the Woodvilles' power base in Wales, it was done indirectly when Prince Edward was sent to rule. His uncle, Earl Rivers, was expected to raise the boy to be able to handle his duties. After Rivers' appointment, More insists other Woodvilles joined the ranks:

> Adjoined were there unto him others of the same party, and in effect every one as he was nearest of kin unto the Queen, so was planted next about the prince. That drift by the Queen not unwisely devised, whereby her blood might of

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[62] Charles Ross' Richard III is an important contribution to the study of Richard's power in the North and the idea of a North/South divide in fifteenth century England.

[63] Hicks, Richard III and his Rivals, 214. See also Lander, Crown and Nobility, 112-13.

> youth be rooted in the princes favor, the Duke of Gloucester turned unto their destruction, and upon that ground set the foundation of all this unhappy building.[64]

In essence, the Woodville faction was clustered around the person of Prince Edward and through the marriage alliances that had been forged. In the Prince's name, Rivers could summon thousands of retainers from Wales and add to those of their ally, Lord Stanley, who could draw four thousand from Lancashire and Cheshire.[65] Prince Richard was ruled much the same way, though he resided with his mother in London. The Princes were both controlled by Woodville.[66] However, the growing entrenchment of Woodville power in Wales left scars. Five years before the usurpation, William Herbert, lost the earldom of Pembroke to Prince Edward. In defiance, Herbert fortified Pembroke castle but was persuaded by the power of the crown to desist and seek the Queen's pardon.[67] The Woodville family's ambition made them many enemies.[68]

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[64] More, History of Richard III, 14. Hicks felt that Edward IV's intent was to bring more control to an unruly part of the country, not aggrandize the Woodvilles. However, he did not argue that the Queen's dominance over the prince is justified by many records. See Hicks, Richard III and his Rivals, 223.

[65] Hicks, Richard III and his Rivals, 224. Hicks' research on the power of the Woodvilles expands on J.R. Lander's work in Crown and Nobility. They argue that the rise of Woodville power was considered noble and that the Woodvilles were not as low-born as has often been charged against them.

[66] Hicks explained: "There can be little doubt that the princes' households--and the princes too--identified themselves with the Woodvilles. By this I don't mean that their loyalty to the king was in question--of course it was not--or that their prime loyalty in any way lessened their allegiance to the king. Instead, under the umbrella label of loyal Yorkists and even king's men, they belonged to the faction of the prince, which was directed by the Woodvilles." Hicks, Richard III and his Rivals, 225. I concur with Hicks' appraisal of the Woodville's influence, especially Elizabeth's (p. 218).

[67] Lander, Crown and Nobility, 184. See also Hicks, Richard III and his Rivals, 226. Hicks contributed Buckingham's hatred for the Woodvilles to his Woodville bride and the Queen's ambitions in Wales which conflicted with his own (p. 227).

[68] Hicks declared that the arrests at Stony Stratford successfully crippled the Woodvilles' power by capturing Prince Edward and removing Earl Rivers, as if Rivers and the Prince were the linchpin of Elizabeth's power (p. 227). I disagree. The Welsh along with the Prince's household were loyal to Prince Edward, and Mancini declared they were upset by Richard's abduction of the boy and considered

Gloucester was the only magnate with sufficient power to challenge the Queen after Edward IV's death. There is enough evidence of the unpopularity of the Queen's family to suggest that Gloucester, even in the north, was aware of it. Unfortunately, Edward IV's death put the entire kingdom in an awkward position. There was trouble from France before and after Edward IV's death, for after abrogating the Treaty of Picquigny, the French began attacking English trading ships in the Channel.[69] Also, Prince Edward was too young to rule the kingdom himself, and there was no simple way to resolve the situation. Though Edward IV insisted that Gloucester become Protector, that decision was despised by the Woodvilles, who feared legitimately that the Duke would rein them in and diminish their power base. The Queen, the leader of the Woodville faction, was put in a position common to English women in the fifteenth century, a position she had been in before. Widowhood meant freedom to some medieval women, but it was a dangerous position, especially for a queen.[70] As Queen,

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making attempts to free him from Gloucester's and Buckingham's grasp. See Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 83.

[69] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 59: "Whether because often exasperated by Edward's molestation in the past, or because they made light of his unaided forces, in accordance with their fierce and bellicose character the French seized trivial pretexts and began to plunder English traders and vessels." This apparently continued until at least August, 1483 in which Richard III wrote to Louis XI and complained about the harassment by French ships. For a French/English translation, see James Gairdner, ed., Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Reigns of Richard III and Henry VII (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1861), 34-35.

[70] One of the experts of dowager customs in England is Joel T. Rosenthal: "To be a queen was to receive a hand with many losing cards, and only by great luck and skill could one hope to avoid a heavy share of misery." See Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth-Century England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 181.

only her husband could gainsay her. However, upon his death she was relegated into the legal charge of another. In Woodville's case, Edward IV had chosen Gloucester.[71]

A woman's legal identity in the fifteenth century was managed by her husband. When he died, her actions were legally limited. For example, the Queen Dowager was not allowed the freedom to remarry without royal permission.[72] When Woodville's first husband died fighting against Edward IV at the second battle of St. Albans in 1461, her dower rights to her husband's lands were challenged by her in-laws. To fight for her rights and the rights of her two sons, she enlisted the help of Lord Hastings, with whom she negotiated marriages between their children.[73] Fortunately for Woodville, Edward IV was accessible at Stony Stratford during a hunting trip, and she was able to plead for the restoration of her dower lands. In so doing, she made herself and her family known to the King. With Edward V speaking in favor of her dower rights, no one could deny Woodville what was hers. However, when her second marriage ended, whoever controlled the Prince controlled her rights and expectations as Queen Dowager. Woodville was ambitious enough to desire that control herself, for she would not want

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[71] Vergil's Anglica Historia declared that "the king at his death had committed to [Richard] only, wife, children, goods, and all that ever he had." See Vergil, Anglica Historia, 173. Mancini wrote: "One was that the Duke of Gloucester should govern, because Edward in his will had so directed, and because by law the government ought to devolve on him." See Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 71. However, there is no extant copy of Edward's will, though it has been insinuated that Richard III destroyed it. See A Collection of All the Wills, Now Known to be Extant, of the Kings and Queens of England (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), 345. It is more likely, however, that Elizabeth had possession of it to keep the physical record from being used against her.

[72] Rosenthal, Patriarchy, 180: "Parliament passed a statute in 1428 making it illegal for the royal dowager to remarry without the consent of the king and council."

[73] MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville, 29-32.

her economic and political support controlled by her husband's brother.[74] She knew that if Richard became protector and ruled in her son's name, he could systematically counter all of the moves she had made to entrench her family's power throughout England. She would not have forgotten the lesson her husband had learned in letting Warwick grow too powerful. In defiance of Edward IV's authority, Warwick had instigated several rebellions, which cost the king temporary control of his kingdom. To the Queen, Gloucester was as much a threat as Warwick had been. Since her family had fomented hostility among the noble peers--men like Gloucester, Buckingham, and Howard--she had to gamble to win control of the Prince and insure her family's position in England during the subsequent monarchy. However, it required her to eliminate the only man powerful enough to stop her.

In April 1483, Woodville had the motive, the resources, and the ambition to plan such an overthrow. Because Edward IV's death came as a surprise, it did not give her much time to prepare it. To obtain the political advantage, she needed to bring Prince Edward down from Wales with the largest escort she could negotiate: "When the counsellors of the dead king, who were then attending the queen at Westminster, had fixed upon a day on which Edward, the king's eldest son . . . should hasten to London to receive the insignia of his coronation, various arguments were put forward by some people as to the number of men which might be considered adequate for a young price

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[74] Rosenthal recognized the precarious position queens found themselves in: "What was given was frequently taken away. If women in general were expendable commodities, royal widows were but left-overs, relics whose potential for embarrassment and trouble was infinitely greater than any positive wisdom or contribution they might be allowed to offer." See Rosenthal, Patriarchy, 182.

on a journey of this kind."[75] Immediately, there arose confrontation in the council about how large it should be. The size of two thousand was eventually agreed upon. Her son and his household retinue were gathered up and started the march eastward to London in mid-April 1483. They stopped in Stony Stratford to wait for Gloucester. If Woodville did prepare an ambush for him along the road to London, it is likely that the attempt would occur along the way to Stony Stratford. If Gloucester was apprised of this plot, the arrests of Rivers and Grey were justified. It also explains Woodville's sudden flight to Westminster and her prolonged stay there. However, the Queen's move to Westminster was not an acknowledgment of defeat. It put her safely out of Gloucester's hands and allowed her to prepare her next attempt to seize control of the throne, an opportunity she would not have had locked up in the Tower.[76] Woodville's power was seriously jeopardized, but it was not lost altogether.

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[75] Croyland Chronicle, 153.

[76] Leyser, Medieval Women, 174. "Widows who took their sons' part in any kind of intrigue ran the risk of ending up destitute and in prison, fate which Margaret [Beaufort] had brought on herself for the part she had played in the conspiracy against Richard III in 1483."

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion:
The End of Sanctuary in England

Elizabeth Woodville was a politically shrewd and controversial woman in fifteenth-century England. The examples of her family's ambition are generally used to show that their greed for land overpowered their common sense. The Queen had fought for nearly twenty years for the common acknowledgment that the Woodville family were peers of the realm who should enjoy all the rights and privileges appertaining to that position. Her coronation ceremony was as lavish as any queen before her.[1] The political marriages she negotiated for her family were not beyond her rights. The sudden death of Edward IV created the possibility that her twenty-year work would be overturned if another rose to power who was not as favorable to her faction as her husband had been. Her son's boast in the Council of London does not appear to be an idle one: "We are so important, that even without the king's uncle we can make and enforce these decisions."[2] Yet the accusation of murder should not be leveled without sufficient evidence. The source of the evidence against Elizabeth originates from Richard of Gloucester himself.

A preponderance of evidence in the primary sources indicate that either Richard of Gloucester lied at Stony Stratford about an attempt against his life, or he truly

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[1] MacGibbon, Elizabeth Woodville, 40-55. The primary source relating to the decadence of Woodville's coronation is found in a contemporary record of it. See George Smith, The Coronation of Elizabeth Wydeville (1465). (Gloucester: Lancresse Printers, 1975).

[2] Mancini, The Usurpation of Richard III, 73-75.

believed that the Woodvilles were plotting to kill him. He made a public accusation against the Queen and her family. The idea that the accusation was invented by Richard is generally accepted even by the contemporary chroniclers themselves. Dominic Mancini did not believe it. In his record about the Usurpation of Richard III, he declared that upon entering London, Gloucester sent a runner ahead to proclaim that weapons had been found along the road to the city and were to be used to assassinate him: "Since many knew these charges to be false, because the arms in question had been placed there long berfore the late king's death for an altogether different purpose, when war was being waged against the Scots, mistrust both of [Gloucester's] accusation and designs upon the throne was exceedingly augmented."[3] Thomas More did not believe it. The Croyland chronicler did not offer his opinion as to its veracity. Polydore Vergil neglected to include the charge altogether. One explanation is that Vergil did not know about it, which challenges his credibility if it was reported by so many others. If he knew about it, it would have given him additional evidence to use in proving his theory of Gloucester's guilt.

It is difficult trusting a man with honesty who purportedly murdered his own nephews. Yet, in April 1483 no murders had occurred as part of Gloucester's usurpation. The evidence concerning the Protector's honesty--or lack thereof--can be interpreted both ways. However, it is more consistent with sanctuary practices to consider that Elizabeth's flight to Westminster was prompted by fear for her life after a

[3] Ibid., 83.

failed ambush rather than a dramatic response to the arrest of two family members. According to Mancini, Woodville was still in sanctuary when Gloucester arrived in London to explain his actions and accuse her family.[4] She could not defend herself nor does it appear that she made any attempt to. Rather, according to Gloucester himself, Woodville continued to plot against his life. To protect himself, the duke summoned an army from York to London.

Elizabeth Woodville was capable of instigating a conspiracy. Vergil recorded the details of her involvement in the plot to dethrone Richard III in October 1483, joining a plot launched by Archbishop Morton, Buckingham, and Henry Tudor's mother, Margaret Beaufort. Secret messengers were sent to her in sanctuary to confide the details. The walls of the Abbey continued to protect her when the plot was discovered and Buckingham was executed for treason. Realizing that Woodville made a better ally than enemy, Richard III eventually persuaded her to accept a lower position under his kingship with his protection offered to her and her daughters. In other words, he offered her absolution for her crimes against him, which she negotiated in the form of a public announcement, one last safeguard to herself before she left the protection of sanctuary. Whether she believed he was responsible for the murder of her sons or not, she trusted him enough to voluntarily leave sanctuary, to be known at "Dame Elizabeth Grey," and to have her daughters participate in Richard's court.[5] This agreement

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[4] Ibid., 83-85.

[5] One example of this is found in the Croyland Chronicle, 175: "Nevertheless it should not be left unsaid that during this Christmas feast too much attention was paid to singing and dancing and to

between Elizabeth and Richard was not only a formal arrangement for protection but also a settlement of Elizabeth's dower rights.

The change in Woodville's legal status from wife and queen to widow and dowager drove her to plot murder as an alternative to subservience. In the past, she had had good reason to fear George of Clarence and in all probability acted in collusion with Edward IV to convict him of treason and then execute him. Mancini related that Woodville "concluded that her offspring by the king would never come to the throne, unless the duke of Clarence were removed; and of this she easily persauded the king." The queen's alarm was intensified by the comeliness of the duke of Clarence, which would make him appear worthy of the crown: "Besides he possessed such mastery of popular eloquence that nothing upon which he set his heart seemed difficult for him to achieve."[6] The force of Clarence's personality was recognized by Mancini and the author of the Croyland Chronicle.[7] Gloucester was acclaimed for his military prowess, and he did not carry a reputation for court intrigue as his father and brothers had. Nevertheless, Woodville knew that he fought for what he wanted, including the right to marry Anne Neville and the estates granted him under duress from the Countess of Oxford.[8] She was aware that many powerful lords in the North would have preferred

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vain exchanges of clothing between Queen Anne and Lady Elizabeth, eldest daughter of the dead king, who were alike in complexion and figure."

[6] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 63.

[7] The author of the Croyland account wrote that the "common folk" viewed Clarence with awe: "They regarded the earl of Warwick, the duke of Clarence and any other great man in the land who withdrew from royal circles as idols of this kind." See Croyland Chronicle, 147.

[8] Michael Hicks, "The Last Days of Elizabeth, Countess of Oxford," Richard III and his Rivals (London: The Hambledon Press, 1991), 297-316.

seeing the Protector on the throne than her own children. When her husband decided to relegate her to Gloucester's protection, she acted under her own authority, utilizing the power and connections she had created during her reign as Queen. By eliminating him, the only power left to oppose her would be Hastings, who had threatened to leave for Calais if she gained power. The Queen could not afford to trust her brother-in-law's popular appeal for fear of losing everything she had earned. Likewise, Gloucester also risked losing everything.

Richard of Gloucester recognized that his position of prominence in the realm shifted precariously when Edward IV died. It is impossible to determine how he felt when he learned of his brother's death. The reports indicated that he held mourning services in York and sent promises to London that he would secure the accession of Edward's children, including his daughters. Polydore Vergil wrote in Anglica Historia that Richard, "calling together unto York the honorable and worshipful of the country thereabout, he commanded all men to swear obedience unto prince Edward; himself was the first that took the oath, which soon after he was the first to violate."[9] Mancini's record describes a letter Gloucester sent to London, affirming that "he had been loyal to his brother Edward, at home and abroad, in peace and war, and would be, if only permitted, equally loyal to his brother's son, and to all his brother's issue, even female,

[9] Polydore Vergil, Anglica Historia, 173.

if perchance, which God forbid, the youth should die."[10] The Croyland Chronicle recorded the funeral ceremony held for Edward IV in York:

> In the meanwhile the duke of Gloucester wrote the most pleasant letters to console the queen; he promised to come and offer submission, fealty and all that was due from him to his lord and king, Edward V, the first-born son of his brother the dead king and the queen. He therefore came to York with an appropriate company, all dressed in mourning, and held a solemn funeral ceremony for the king, full of tears. He bound, by oath, all the nobility of those parts in fealty to the king's son; he himself swore first of all.[11]

Living in his father-in-law's lands, Gloucester saw himself in a position similar to what the Earl of Warwick had been in. Yet operating under the assumption that the Protector did not intend originally to usurp the throne, it is reasonable that when he reached Northampton and dined with Rivers, he did not know of any plot against his life. Receiving a warning during the night, he decided to act decisively and strategically.

The events of history cannot be replayed to see what would have happened had Gloucester been killed at Stony Stratford. Elizabeth Woodville was unprepared for the sudden loss of power and her second widowhood. She provoked Gloucester's usurpation by plotting an assassination attempt on his life. It was the means to the ends of her political and economical security in addition to the secure succession of her son to the throne. When she failed, she could not trust that the duke would mercifully forgive such an act of violence, and she exiled herself into the secure walls of sanctuary. The privileges of Westminster Abbey protected her children and her property, leaving the Protector only the option to secure the Abbey's perimeter with soldiers to control

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[10] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 73.

[11] Croyland Chronicle, 155.

who went in and who went out. He could not cut off supplies to the entire abbey without affecting everyone within. Thus he could not starve the Queen out. Gloucester also risked a confrontation and possible excommunication if he attempted to drag Prince Richard or any of Woodville's children out by force. The Abbey was systematically quick to defend its privileges; the legal cases of precedence for previous violations were less than a century old, involving a previous Duke of Gloucester. The size of Westminster Abbey's property allowed spies to enter and see Woodville. It also allowed the Marquess, Woodville's son from a previous marriage, to escape sanctuary and flee to France. Even during Richard III's reign, he kept sanctuary inviolate, though rebels supporting Henry Tudor plotted and planned to seize Elizabeth's oldest daughters and carry them overseas.[12] Though sanctuary limited Elizabeth's personal freedom, it also protected her from her brother-in-law's power.

The abuses of sanctuary privileges that were beneficial to Henry Tudor's accession were also seen by him as a challenge to the royal authority. But not even Henry VII was powerful enough to despoil Westminster's sanctuary, though he contributed to the demise of the practice by disenfranchising other sanctuaries throughout England with lesser privileges. Henry VIII's disaffection with the Catholic church gave him, as head of the Church of England, the highest secular and ecclesiastical authority. It was under his kingship that the powers and privileges of

[12] Ibid., 163: "There was also a rumour that those men who had fled to sanctuaries had advised that some of the king's daughters should leave Westminster in disguise and go overseas so that if any human fate, inside the Tower, were to befall the male children, nevertheless through the saving of the persons of the daughters the kingdom might some day return to the rightful heirs."

sanctuary were stripped legally and in practice from the many other churches and abbeys that practiced them but could not prove them. Henry VIII limited it to exceptional cases. Still, the privileges existed until formally abolished under James I, nearly a century and a half after Richard of Gloucester had need to remove his nephew from Westminster. What is significant about the usurpation of Richard III was not the cunning and shrewd manner in which it was done or the allegations of murder, conspiracy, and treason which adorned the difficult period between the Wars of the Roses and Henry VII's coronation. The fact that a privilege such as sanctuary survived these tumultuous upheavals is significant. As shrewd and wicked as Richard III is painted to be by his critics, it is noteworthy and exceptional that he is accused of "intending" to violate sanctuary rather than actually doing it.[13] His insistence that his sister-in-law be convinced to release Prince Richard, that she be persuaded and negotiated with to release her daughters, rather than removing them by the force of his authority shows that the power of sanctuary was stronger than his own. That power was recognized by Henry Tudor and his successors as being politically unfavorable to a king and was then challenged and abrogated. The fall of Richard III at Bosworth Field ended not only the Plantagenet dynasty but also triggered the collapse of the abbey walls of Westminster. Woodville was safe in sanctuary during Richard III's reign.

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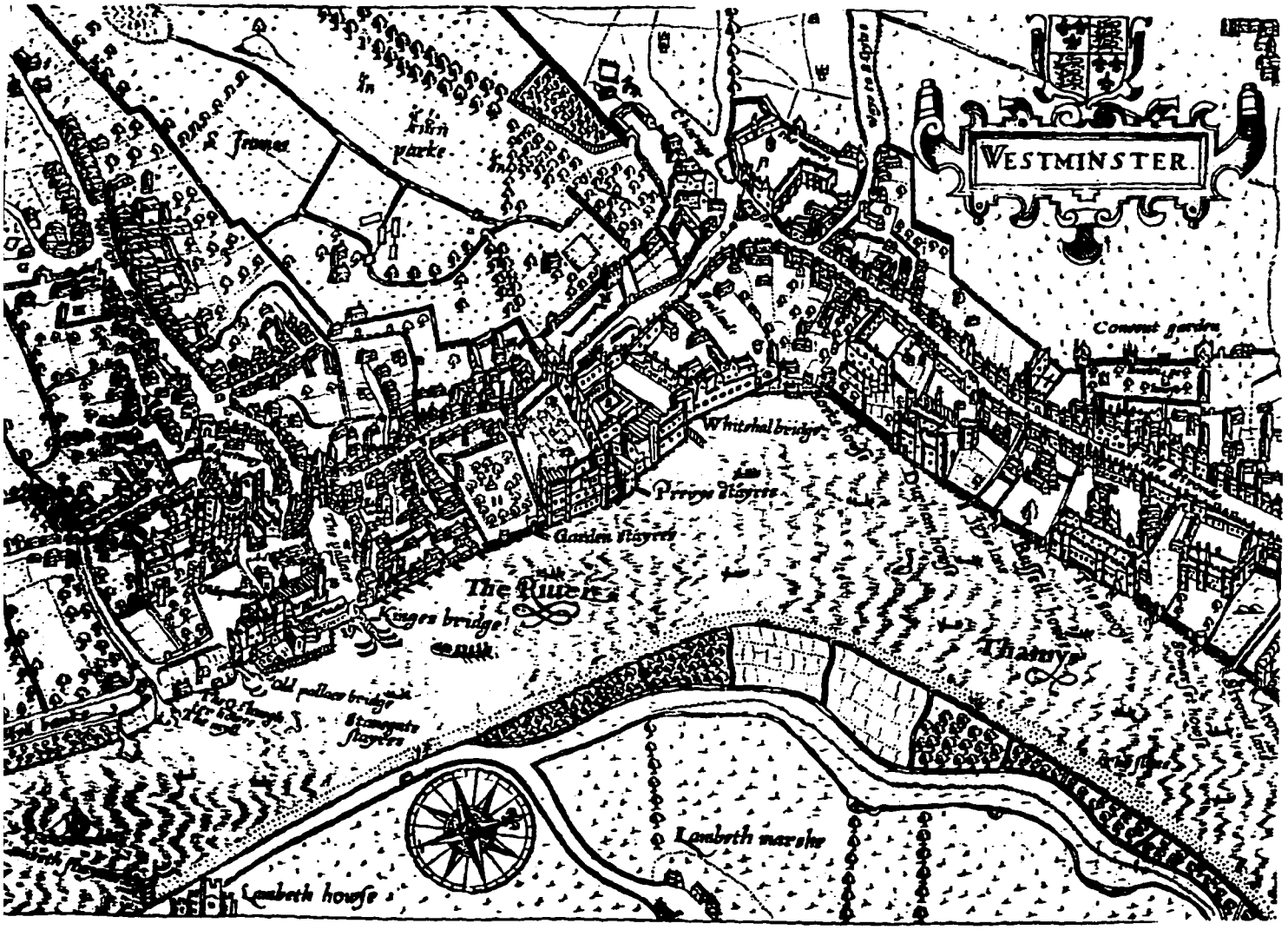
[13] Mancini, Usurpation of Richard III, 89. "Wherefore, [Gloucester] said that, since this boy was held by his mother against his will in sanctuary, he should be liberated, because the sanctuary had been founded by their ancestors as a place of refuge, not of detention, and this boy wanted to be with his brother. Therefore with the consent of the council he surrounded the sanctuary with troops. When the queen saw herself besieged and preparation for violence, she surrendered her son, trusting in the word of the cardinal of Canterbury, that the boy should be restored after the coronation."

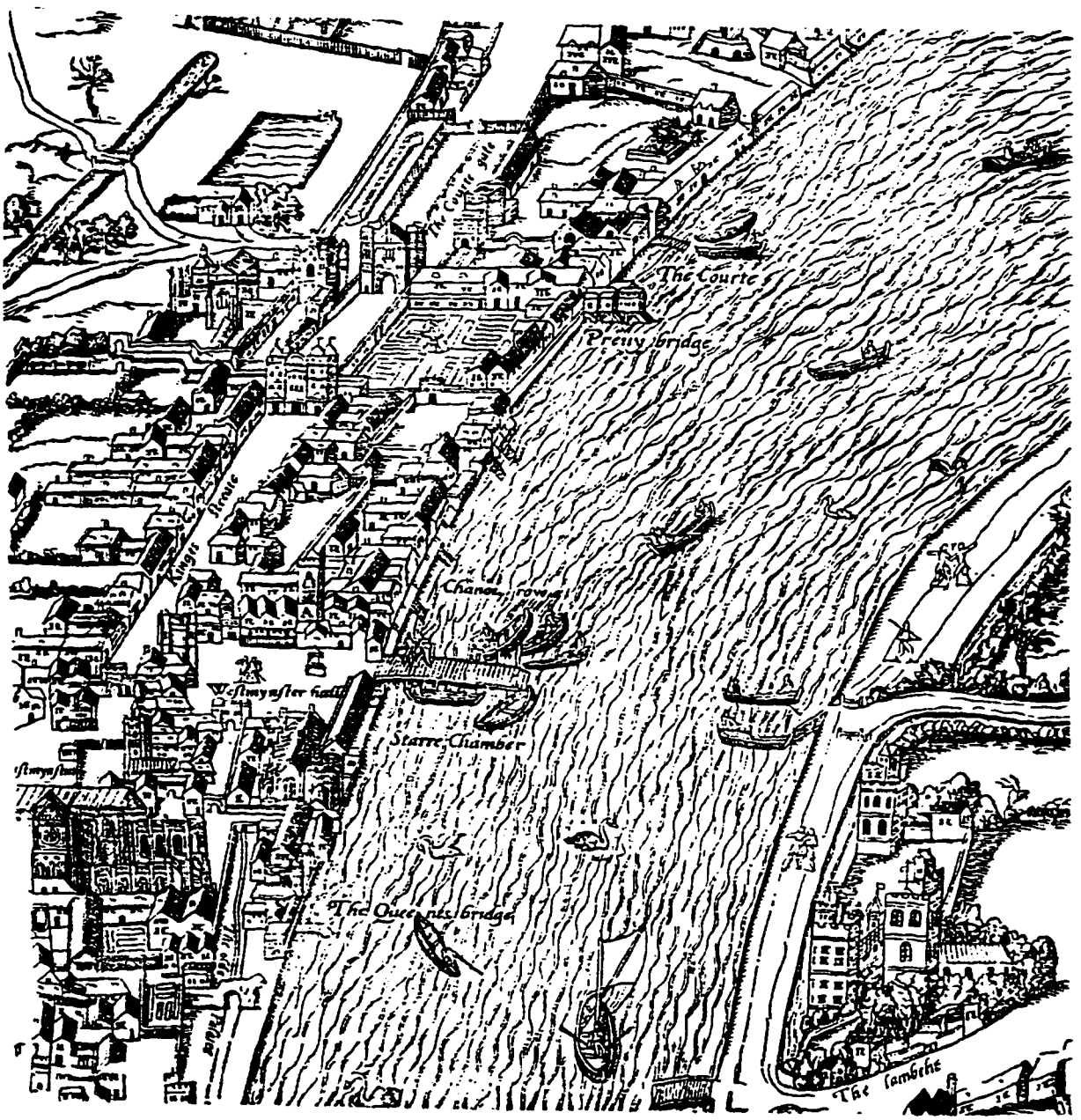
Unfortunately, she was not equally safe under the reign of her son-in-law. Elizabeth Woodville died in Bermondsey Abbey in 1492, before Polydore Vergil, Thomas More, or Edward Hall had the opportunity to meet and interview her. Her story, contained in fragments in their histories, continues to be as controversial as her brother-in-law's, Richard III.

Appendix I:



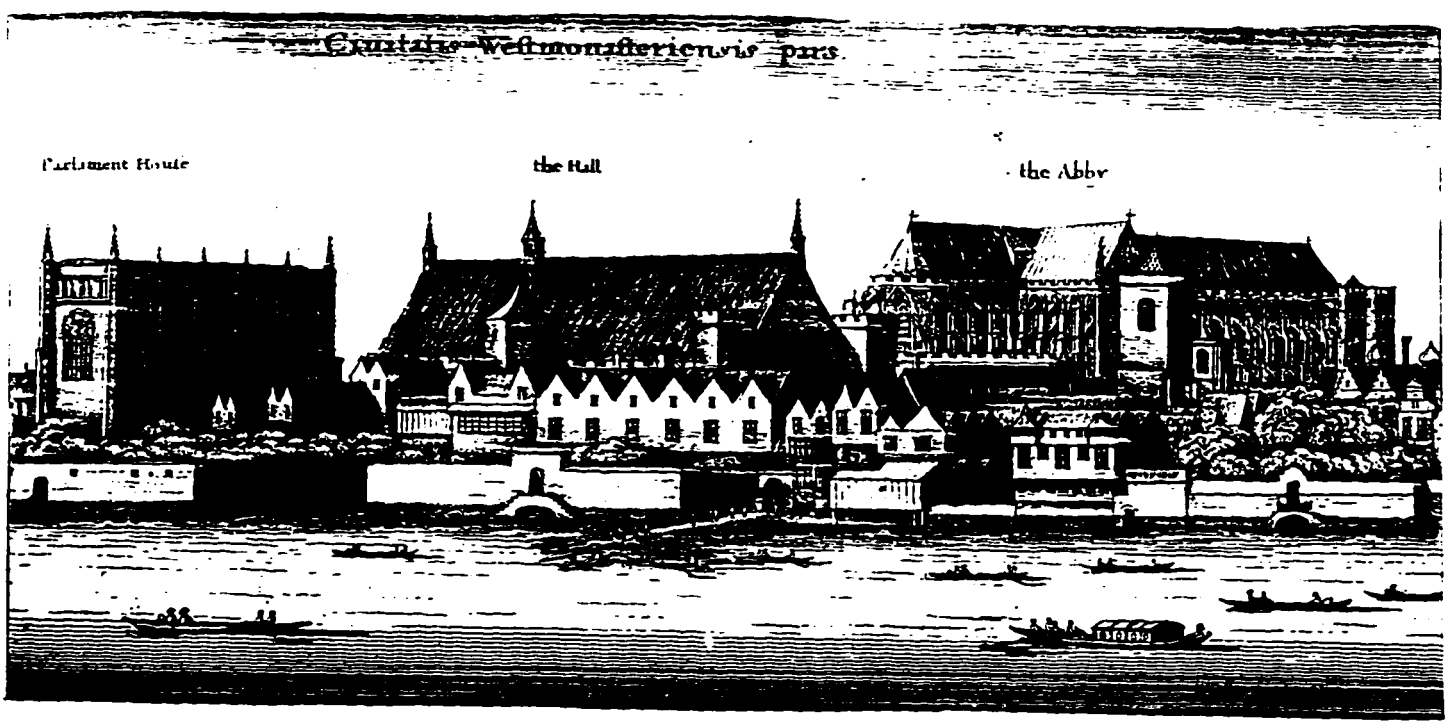
ILLUS. 3 Detail of Norden's Map of London 1593 from Speculum Britanniae

Museum of London



ILLUS. 4 Detail from Ralph Agas Map of London, c. 1560-1570

Museum of London

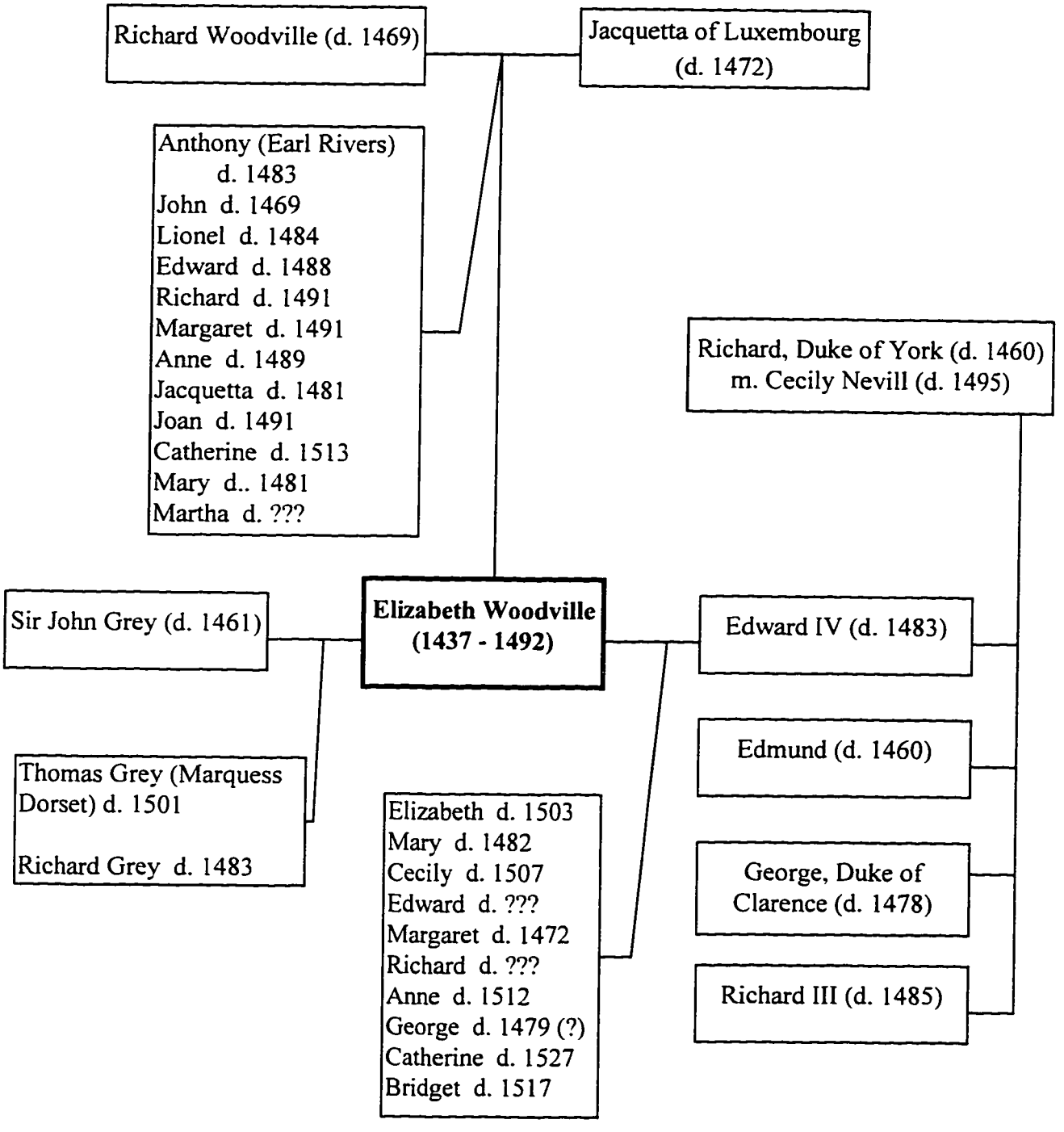


ILLUS. 6 The Palace and Abbey of Westminster, by Hollar, 1647

V & A Picture Library

Appendix II:

Elizabeth Woodville's Family



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